CHRIST
Above
ALL

V.P.Black

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Foreword

It is the purpose of this book to show that the Bible is a practical book, and when we preach the Bible we will do practical teaching.

During my forty years of work with the Plateau church (now Central) in Mobile, Alabama, these are some of the lessons I taught.

The Bible is God's final, complete and authoritative revelation to man. I believe the most needed thing in the Lord's church is plain, simple Bible teaching.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Mrs. Hazel Gardner, Booneville, Mississippi. Mrs. Gardner has assisted me in writing seven books, doing all the typing and proofreading. She has done all this work without any remuneration.

Appreciation

I want to express my appreciation to Sister Lois Collins of Rayville, Louisiana, for financing the publication of this book.

V. P. BLACK

Introduction

V.P. Black was born in Lamar County, Alabama. He was born into a family of ten boys, of whom four became gospel preachers.

V.P. Black attended Freed-Hardeman University and received his B.A. degree at Faulkner University. He received his L.L.D. degree by the Alabama Christian School of Religion.

He worked with the church in Booneville, Mississippi, four years, and Avon Park, Florida, two years. He worked with the Plateau church in Mobile, Alabama (now Central), for forty years. He was the pulpit minister for 28 years and for the next twelve years conducted gospel meetings for this church.

V.P. Black is a longtime friend of mine. We worked together for twenty years promoting Christian education. We served together for twenty years on the boards of two schools, Faulkner University and the Namwianga Christian School in Zambia, Africa. We made two trips to Zambia promoting Christian education.

V.P. Black has been a strong supporter of Christian education. It is amazing what this man has done in promoting Christian education. He has worked almost thirty years for Faulkner University and has never received a salary for his work. He has given to Faulkner University over one hundred thousand dollars from the sale of his four hardback books. He has set up a fund at Freed Hardeman University and has built that fund to one hundred thousand dollars and only the interest on this money can be spent to help young men to prepare for the ministry. He has raised money to send hundreds of young people to school in Zambia.

V.P. Black has been a very influential writer: over four hundred thousand of his books on stewardship have been studied in Churches of Christ. No doubt, V.P. Black has taught more people to give liberally of their means than any man living.

V.P. Black is an outstanding evangelist. He has preached in almost all the states and in foreign countries. A few years ago he preached in a meeting for his home congregation and baptized 52 people. When the churches in Mobile decided to have a co-operative meeting they asked their own V.P. Black to preach in this revival; 98 people were baptized and 169 were restored. He preached in a co-operative meeting in Anniston, Alabama, and 69 were baptized, 65 baptized in Summerville, Georgia. He has conducted many great revivals. The last twenty years Brother Black has spent all his time preaching in revivals, teaching on stewardship and working for Christian education.

V.P. Black by nature is a leader. I have been in many board meetings with him. When some problem was being discussed, someone would ask, "What does Brother Black think about it?" I have detected that he is a man of wisdom and good judgment.

V.P. Black is a very dedicated man. He is a hard worker. He has memorized much of the Bible. He is constantly promoting good works. He has converted and baptized great numbers. He is a great inspiration to the churches. I needed Brother Black to come to Searcy to help me raise some money. He came and we got the money. After working with Brother Black for twenty years I am convinced that there is no man higher on God's measuring rod than V.P. Black.

Dr. George S. Benson
President-Emeritus
Harding University
Searcy, Arkansas, 1991

The Publisher's Statement

One of the paramount strengths of the church in past years was its preaching — great preaching — done by men of great ability and dedication, preaching from the heart, and above all, preaching that was based on God's eternal word.

Many of our preachers who fell into that category have passed on to their eternal reward. We miss them and the church is suffering without them.

One of the preachers I would place in that number remains with us to this day. I refer to Brother V.P. Black. Although Brother Black makes his home in Alabama, he is known far and wide for his faithful preaching of God's word. He is in constant demand, which is evidenced by the fact that he gives full time to gospel meeting work. Interspersed within that framework, a good percentage of his time is devoted to his outstanding series of meetings on stewardship. Only eternity will reveal all the good he has done.

This latest book of Brother Black's sermons reflects the kind of preaching he does. It is informative, inspiring, scriptural, and powerful. Young preachers, in particular, would do well to read these sermons carefully, to look at the man who preached them, and to discover what it really means to be a preacher and a proclaimer of God's will. How we need more preachers today like Brother Black, men who are converted, who know the truth, and who are not ashamed to deliver the gospel which is God's power unto salvation.

Gospel preaching is still needed. It has not gone out of style and it never will. Pretty speeches, the wisdom of men, devotional sermonettes, and a thousand other things cannot take its place. Those who are attracted by personality, by gimmicks, by professionalism, by education, by materialism, rather than by the message, the gospel, the Saviour, have missed it all. This is not to say that there is no need for training, or a good personality, or other assets, but in order for a preacher to be truly effective he must be grounded in the scriptures, and dedicated to the Lord in body and soul *to* the task of proclaiming the gospel for the saving of souls. We must return to that emphasis and produce that kind of preacher if the church is to grow and the cause of Christ is to spread.

With these words, I present to you Brother V.P. Black, gospel preacher, one who knows what it means to preach CHRIST ABOVE ALL.

J.C. Choate
Winona, MS
Feb. 18, 1991

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1

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

''And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in Spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'' (Matthew 5:1-3).

Jesus Christ was not in the temple, but on a mountainside, when He uttered these words. It was on this common mountain that our Lord taught this lesson on the beatitudes which is the blueprint for man's happiness.

The Ten Commandment Law was given on a mountain. This great sermon on the beatitudes was preached on a mountain. When the Ten Commandment Law was given, it was given amid thunder and lightning. The beatitudes were given in a quiet and serene setting.

The mountain where this sermon was preached cannot be positively identified. When visiting the Holy Land, I am told this is the place where He cast out evil spirits; this is the place where He was baptized; this is the place where His body was laid; this is the place from which He ascended back to Heaven; this is the mountain from which He preached the beatitudes.

Much of this is tradition. We know that the Sermon on the Mount was taught somewhere near the city of Capernaum, no doubt, near Nazareth and Tiberias. Wherever the place, it is called the Mount of Beatitudes.

It has been thought by some that the Sermon on the Mount was spoken only to His disciples. And some passages, such as Matthew 6:25-34, have been explained as applying to the apostles only, on the ground that the sermon was preached to them alone.

However, this idea is obviously false. In Matthew 5:1, we are told that a multitude was there to hear Him. Then in Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount, we read that Jesus had spent the night in prayer, came to a great crowd of His disciples and selected twelve of them to be His apostles. Then He came down the mountain and stood on a level place before a great multitude of people from all over Palestine, and preached to them (Luke 6:12-19).

We have positive proof that the multitudes heard Him. "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29).

The teaching of Jesus on this occasion was not a compilation of the works of great men, either before His day or of His contemporaries. This Sermon on the Mount was different from anything that had ever been taught. He quoted no one as authority for His teaching. He often used these phrases: "Moses said, . . . but I say unto you," and "It has been said of old, . . . but I say unto you."

The teaching of the beatitudes was designed to help sinful man have a better understanding of the blueprint for Christian living.

The teaching of the beatitudes was designed to remove loneliness, despair, and discouragement from the hearts of those who wanted to serve God.

The teaching of the beatitudes was designed to let the poor, ignorant, and "whosoever will" follow Jesus.

The teaching of the beatitudes was designed to show people how to be happy.

The Old Testament ended with a curse (Malachi 4:6). The New Testament begins with a blessing (Acts 3:26).

He opened His mouth and taught them. He taught many lessons without opening His mouth. He taught great lessons when He lived a holy and exemplary life before men, and also when He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and when He was in Pilate's judgment hall.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." This statement is so contrary to the thinking of the world. The world says, "Blessed are they that are materially rich; blessed are the great and powerful; blessed are those who lay up treasures upon the earth; blessed are the highly educated, and those who are wise in their own conceits; blessed are the high and mighty; blessed are those who are honorable in the eyes of the world; blessed are those who spend their days in mirth and pleasure."

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Most of us have some idea as to what it means to be poor in material things, or to be poor in health. But there are things about being poor that we may have overlooked. Poverty does not consist altogether in having few possessions. A man does not feel poor until he realizes his need, or even his desire for the things that he cannot have. And a man is not really poor until he feels his poverty.

The Indian, who roamed this country in the long ago, had very little, and yet he was not poor. He had all he wanted or needed.

To be really poor in spirit is to be destitute of the things the spirit needs and to realize that need. The unsaved man is destitute of every spiritual blessing because he is out of Christ, and all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3; Second Timothy 2:10; Second Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1).

The unsaved man must recognize the fact that he needs God, he needs the Saviour; he needs faith; he needs cleansing from sin; he needs righteousness; he needs hope; and without these things, he is destitute.

When Jesus said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners," He did not mean that some were so righteous that they did not need Him. Every accountable person has sinned (Romans 3:23, First Kings 8:46, First John 1:7-9). He was talking about the self-righteous Pharisees who felt superior to Jesus, and said they did not need Him. Jesus Christ did not call them, nor does He call such today. He calls those who are poor in spirit (Matthew 11:28-30).

As long as a person delights in his sin, he does not feel it a burden and will not get rid of it. He will not seek the Saviour, as he does not feel the need of Him.

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).

"Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isaiah 66:1-2).

"And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31).

The poor in spirit have no resources of their own that will enable them to make a plan by which they can save themselves, nor can they generate light by which to walk.

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23).

We are all desperately poor, and when we realize this, we will depend upon God. If a man is a condemned sinner and does not, or knowing it, does not care, he is in a pitiable condition, for nothing can be done for him. But if a man is lost and mourns over his condition, he can be helped, and that is a blessed condition.

The Lord is not suggesting that material poverty is a good thing. Although the Bible is explicit in its warnings against riches, it never teaches that poverty is virtuous. It is not good for people to live in slums, or to be without food and medical attention. These things are more likely to produce materialism than spirituality, more likely to produce sinful lives than righteous lives.

These beatitudes are regarded by many as maxims, mottoes, or some kind of a social document to govern or regulate social affairs. But the Sermon on the Mount is a doctrinal declaration.

To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of one's self; to be aware of the fact that we are sinners and have no righteousness of our own (Romans 4:4; Luke 17:10; Ephesians 2:8-9). To be poor in spirit is to be willing to be where God places us; to bear what He lays upon us; to go where He bids us; and to do what He commands us.

We could say, without doing harm to this beatitude, "Blessed are the poor on the inside." He is begging on the inside, not necessarily on the outside.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

It is not material poverty that Jesus commends in the first beatitude, but rather the complete poverty of spirit necessary for the possession and enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven. In fact, nowhere does the Lord teach there is inherent merit in material poverty, any more than He teaches there is inherent merit in material prosperity.

It is possibly true that the materially poor are more likely than the rich to seek the true happiness that comes from God, and not depend upon material things for their well-being. In this way only can poverty be accepted as a more blessed state than prosperity.

It is possible for poverty to be anything but praiseworthy. It is also possible for prosperity to be anything but blameworthy. It is possible for one to be poor in spirit, while, at the same time, to be prosperous in material things. These people possess their wealth instead of their wealth possessing them. Such people are willing to give it up at any moment, if it is God's will. These people can say, as did Job, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

The scriptures plainly affirm that the righteous God can only bless those who are humble, who sincerely empty themselves that God may fill them with His goodness through prayer and study of His Word.

Poverty of spirit is not a fruit of nature. By nature we are well pleased with ourselves, and foolish enough to believe that we deserve something good at the hands of God. Poverty of spirit is not to be found in the average religious person. How seldom do we read of one who is spiritually emptied, emptied of self-confidence, self-importance, and self-righteousness. That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God many times.

What is poverty of spirit? It is opposite of that haughty, self-assertive, and self-sufficient disposition which the world so much admires and praises. It is the very reverse of that independent and defiant attitude which refuses to bow to God, that is determined to brave things out, which says, as did Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?"

The poor in spirit are those who empty the heart of self that Christ may fill it with a sense of need and destitution. The first beatitude is foundational, describing a fundamental trait which is found in every regenerated soul.

The philosophers and wise of the world have never put the poor in spirit among their moral virtues, but Christ puts it first in the beatitudes.

Why did Christ put it first? He is teaching about a new kind of living, a new standard, and a new way of life. Becoming poor is the first thing that must happen in the life of anyone who would enter the kingdom. The door is very low, and only those who kneel down can enter through this door.

In Luke 18 we read of the contrast between the contrite and the proud.

Jacob had to face the poverty of spirit before God could use him (Genesis 32).

Isaiah could not be used before he was poor in spirit (Isaiah 6:5).

Job was poor in spirit when he blessed God, while God was taking everything away from him.

Gideon was poor in spirit (Judges 6:15).

David was poor in spirit (Second Samuel 7:18).

2

Blessed Are They That Mourn

This beatitude contradicts the view that is prevalent in our society. Few people in this age would pronounce a blessing on the mourners, affirming that they live a truly blessed and happy life. It is an undeniable characteristic of this age to shun all mourning and tears. The philosophy of the world urges men to get all the pleasure they can out of life and to seek fun and entertainment, for this is real happiness as far as the world is concerned.

Synonymous with the word *mourn* is *weep* (Luke 6:21). Thayer tells us that the word *weep* means to mourn, lament. It literally means to weep audibly, to shed tears, to cry as a child.

The mourning that Jesus speaks of in the second beatitude is the sorrow which pierces the heart and expresses itself in audible crying, the shedding of tears.

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (Second Corinthians 7:10).

"And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).

"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (Second Corinthians 6:10).

"To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn" (Isaiah 61:2).

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

If one wants to know something about a person's character, find out what makes him laugh and what makes him weep. What we laugh about, or what we weep over indicates our values of life.

Little children will laugh over matters very serious to adults. Children cry over things that are trivial to adults.

There was a train wreck where many people were killed. A mother was found dead with a child, who was still alive, in her arms. When the child was taken from the mother, the child laughed and played, but when candy was taken from the child, the child cried. The fact that the mother was dead did not bother the child because the child knew nothing about death. This means the higher we go in life, the more vulnerable we are to sorrow.

Whenever one enters into the experience of joy, one makes himself a candidate for sorrow. A young couple who marries experiences joy, but suppose she becomes ill with a terminal disease, or suppose he becomes hopelessly crippled in an accident.

A couple can bring children into the world, and children are a joy, but suppose one of them develops leukemia and dies. Just about everything in life that brings joy can also be a source of sorrow. And to many the only way to escape that sorrow is to run away from life.

In Psalm 55, one of the great psalms of David, he recites the depth of pain that the heart knows in the disappointments and sorrows of life, and then cries out, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest" (Psalm 55:6-8).

All men at one time or another have felt as David when they face sorrow, disappointment, and discouragement. Oh, if we only had wings to fly away from it all!

This beatitude sounds paradoxical. Happy are they that mourn. The whole structure of the man of the world is to avoid mourning, sorrow, and pain. Yet when we study the Bible, we learn it was a common thing for man to mourn.

Abraham wept when Sarah died. David said, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" (Psalm 42:2-3).

"I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy" (Second Timothy 1:3-4).

Timothy wept because of discouragement and defeat.

The prophet, who had been called by God to preach to Israel about a coming judgment, came and preached with tears. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people" (Jeremiah 9:1).

"Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31).

The Psalmist shed tears of loneliness. Timothy shed tears of discouragement. Jeremiah shed tears of disappointment. Paul shed tears of concern.

"And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

The mourning of this beatitude springs from a sense of sin, from a tender conscience, from a broken heart. It is godly sorrow over rebellion against God and hostility to His will. This mourning is the agonizing realization that it was my sins that nailed the Lord of Glory to the cross.

Our Lord never tried to escape the sorrows of life, nor did He deny that they existed. Jesus did not tell His disciples to go out and look for sorrow, but He did tell them that He was able to transform their tears and bring them comfort.

Mourning and sorrow alone never made a person better. I think I have seen them make people bitter. But sorrow and mourning plus Jesus Christ can make one strong spiritually.

If we are to experience the comfort that comes from mourning, we must recognize the fact that there are at least three kinds of mourning.

There is natural sorrow. This kind of sorrow comes to everybody — the saved, the unsaved, the rich, the poor, the old, the young, the educated, the uneducated.

Nehemiah sat down and wept when he heard that the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down and that the gates were burned.

Oh, how many times have I thought that Paul must have cried his heart out when he embraced his dear friends at Ephesus, knowing that he would not see them again this side of judgment.

Solomon said, "To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

Natural sorrow expressed in mourning releases a healing process in a person's life and enables him to accept the pain, work his way through, and adjust to life again.

Some people have the idea that weeping is a sign of weakness. Self-pity is a sign of weakness, but not natural mourning.

There is unnatural mourning. It is unnatural because its effect in our lives is opposite to what God wants us to experience. Natural mourning heals, but unnatural mourning makes the wound deeper and fills the heart with pain.

Unnatural sorrow isolates one from reality. Psychologists, who have studied bereavement, tell us that unnatural mourning is brought about by many causes. One major cause is selfishness. A self-centered person uses other people to make his own life sane and pleasant. If he loses a loved one, it upsets his life style, and it hurts. His mourning is more for himself than for the deceased.

Fear is another cause of unnatural mourning. It may be fear of the future, fear of change, perhaps even fear of death itself. Excessive tears and mourning then become an invisible armor to protect the person from the hard knocks of life. He is saying, "Don't lay any responsibilities on me. Don't demand too much of me. Can't you see I have enough to bear already?''

Sometimes unnatural grief is brought on by guilt. King David illustrates this unnatural mourning concerning his son. No doubt, most of this mourning was brought on by his guilt.

You recall that David's disobedient son Absalom tried to take the kingdom away from him and almost succeeded. We get the impression that Absalom was a proud person who was very conceited about his beauty. He secretly plotted against his father, drove David from Jerusalem, took over the palace, and then planned to attack David's divided forces and utterly wipe them out.

Instead, David won the battle and Absalom was slain — a death he deserved. Before the battle David begged his leaders, ''Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom.''

When David received the tragic news that Absalom had been slain, he expressed his sorrow with the following words: ''O, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom; would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son.''

Would it have been better for the nation for David to die and Absalom to live? Of course not. David's mourning over Absalom was not natural. The soldiers were actually ashamed of the victory because it brought such sorrow to their king.

David refused to be comforted. It took the blunt speech of Joab to show King David how selfish he was. Joab said to David, ''In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well'' (Second Samuel 19:6).

There is Godly mourning. This Godly mourning is the result of the person having experienced the first beatitude. The scriptural thing for a person to do, when he sees his own spiritual need, is to admit it, and then turn to God for what he needs. The person who is sincerely poor in spirit will mourn over his sins, come to God, and be comforted. True comfort can only be found in the Lord.

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

3

Blessed Are the Meek

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

". . . Receive with meekness the engrafted word" (James 1:21).

"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

Paul said that one of the fruits of the Spirit was meekness (Galatians 5:22-23).

I have been impressed by what Matthew Henry says about meekness: "The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to His Word, and to His rod, who follow His direction, and comply with His designs, and are gentle toward all men; one who can bear provocation without being inflamed by it; one who can remain silent or either return a soft answer; one who can show his displeasure, when there is occasion for it, without being transported into any indecency; one who can be cool when others are hot. They are the meek, who are rarely and hardly provoked, but quickly and easily pacified."

The man is meek who gladly submits to God and to His word. The meek person is not a goody-goody or timid individual. The meek man of whom Christ speaks is one of strong courage and conviction. The meek man is not the submissive, ineffective person that the average man pictures in his mind.

Webster's definition of meekness is: "mild of temper; patient under injuries; long-suffering."

Aristotle had a great deal to say about meekness. He described it as "That virtue between two extremes. On the one extreme there is the spendthrift; on the other hand there is the miser; and in between there is the generous man. On the one extreme there is the man with excessive anger; on the other hand there is the man who never gets angry."

Aristotle thought of meekness as the happy medium between too much and too little anger. He described the meek man as one who is always angry at the right time and is never angry at the wrong time.

"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

When Moses was eighty years old, God appeared unto him and told him to go down into Egypt and deliver the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

Moses was a brave and courageous man when he took his rod and smote the waters of the river Nile, and it became blood (Exodus 7:20).

It took courage for Moses to tell Pharaoh, "And if thou refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs" (Exodus 8:2).

After observing the life of Moses, no one can equate meekness with cowardice. Notice how Moses refused to back down before Pharaoh, who was one of the most powerful men in the world at that time. Let us keep in mind that Moses was a very meek man.

When Pharaoh refused to let the children of Israel go, Moses was determined to convince Pharaoh that God was all powerful and still in charge of all things. Moses stretched out his rod and smote the dust, and it became lice (Exodus 8:16).

Then swarms of flies were sent upon the people (Exodus 8:21).

At this point Pharaoh called for Moses and said, "Go ye and sacrifice to your God in the land." Moses said to Pharaoh, "We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the Lord our God" (Exodus 8:27).

Moses said to Pharaoh, "If you do not let my people go, all your cattle will be affected with grievous murrain" (Exodus 9:3).

Moses took ashes of the furnace and sprinkled them toward heaven. And it caused boils to break forth upon man (Exodus 9:10).

Moses stretched forth his rod, and there was hail, and fire mingled with hail (Exodus 9:24).

Moses stretched forth his rod, and the land was covered with locusts (Exodus 10:12).

Moses stretched his hand toward heaven, and darkness covered the earth which could be felt (Exodus 10:21).

Moses said to Pharaoh, "And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die" (Exodus 11:5).

We learn from Moses' encounter with Pharaoh that a man may be very meek, and at the same time very strong, brave, and courageous. Meekness is power, but it is power under control.

Jesus Christ, in referring to Himself, said, "I am meek and lowly" (Matthew 11:29).

It is true that our Lord was meek as a lamb, but He was also courageous as a lion. Jesus is called a lion (Revelation 5:5).

Jesus was like a lamb when someone made an attack on Him, but He was like a lion when someone attacked what He taught.

Observe how Jesus denounced those hypocritical Pharisees when He saw how they were taking advantage of the people. "And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:15-16).

Let us keep in mind that Jesus said, "I am meek and lowly." The most courageous men in the world have been meek men.

Abraham is another example of meekness. When Abraham was about seventy-five years old, God called upon him to leave his homeland and go into a country that God would show him, and Abraham obeyed God. He took with him his family, his father, Terah, and his nephew Lot.

Years later Abraham and Lot became very wealthy men. "And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou will take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" (Genesis 13:7-9).

Abraham could have said, "Lot, I took you when you had nothing, and I have made you what you are; therefore, I will take the good pasture, and you can have what is left over."

But Abraham did not do this. He had the power to get what he wanted, but it was controlled power. The meek man is one who is in control at all times. Yes, Abraham is a classic example of a meek gentleman.

We need more men with the meekness of Abraham in the church today. If elders would take a lesson from Abraham in meekness, we would not have elders who want to display their power in the affairs of the church.

David is another example of meekness. When David was a young man, he killed Goliath. The people began to praise David, saying, "Saul has slain his thousands and David has slain his ten thousands."

When Saul heard the first stanza, he thought it was a beautiful song, but when he heard the second stanza, his heart was filled with envy.

Saul tried to kill David, and David had to flee for his life. David came upon Saul in a cave, and Saul was asleep. David could have killed Saul. If Saul had had this same opportunity, he would certainly have killed David, and David knew this. But David refused to kill Saul. In fact, some of David's men urged David to kill Saul and put an end to the man who was trying to kill him. Instead of cutting off Saul's head, David cut off the skirt of Saul's robe. David had the power to kill Saul, but kept his power under control.

The difference between these two kings was not that one had power and the other did not, for both had power. The difference was that David's power was under control. He was a meek man. David used his authority to build up people; Saul used people to build up his authority. At one time Saul was going to kill his own son just to show how powerful he was (First Samuel 14:36-45).

David was willing to die for his son even though his son was a rebel (Second Samuel 18:33). David was a meek man; Saul was an arrogant man.

How may I know when I am meek? When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth," He was quoting from Psalm 37 and verse 11. David was going through a lot of trouble at this time in his life. They were slandering him and trying to cut him down. Many react to difficulties by fretting or retaliating. But David said, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil" (Psalm 37:8).

The meek man submits himself and his enemies to God, and will let God handle the problem. The meek man centers his attention and his affection on the Lord, not on himself, nor his enemies. When we fret because of people or circumstances, we have lost our meekness.

The Word of God is to be received with meekness. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

The reason so many cannot understand the Word of God is that they lack meekness. They want to argue with God's Word. They question what God has said. So many people have a stubborn attitude toward the Word of God. Instead of receiving God's Word into an honest and sincere heart, they argue with it and become angry.

When the meek man reads in the Bible that he is to believe on Christ, he will do it. When the meek man reads in the Bible that he is to repent and confess Christ, he will do it. When the meek man reads in the Bible that he is to be baptized to wash away his sin, he will do it.

The meek are not weak by any means! Obviously, it is the opposite quality to arrogance and violence which seek to dominate others because of an insatiable drive for power, and is willing to crush anyone to reach that goal. Men are haughty and proud because of what they think themselves to be. But men who are truly meek already know that they are poor in spirit and have need of God.

Meekness does not mean that one must surrender his rights. Jesus asserted His rights: "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answereth thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John 18:20-23).

Paul was a meek man but also asserted his rights without trampling upon the rights of others. "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia" (Second Corinthians 11:8-10).

"For they shall inherit the earth." Charles Fowler in his comments on this statement says, "Because, more than any others, they enjoy whatever God sends. The wicked in their rush to possess, usually miss or overlook the best of this world, or else, having seen it, they refuse to pay the price to gain it, or having gained it, they are miserable."

J.W. McGarvey has the following to say about inheriting the earth: "They will inherit it in two ways: first, they shall enjoy it more fully while in it; second, they shall finally, in the membership of a triumphant church, have possession and control of it. Possibly, the Saviour alludes to the final possession by the saints of the new earth."

H. Leo Boles in his *Commentary on Matthew* had the following to say about "They shall inherit the earth": "The real enjoyment of earthly blessings belongs not to those who grasp for them, but to those who hold them lightly, and who, ranking them inferior to spiritual blessings, are not burdened by them while they possess them; they are not harassed by the fear of losing earthly possessions. Selfish people may possess the earth, but it is the meek alone who inherit the real blessings of the earth and of the spiritual kingdom. The meek will enjoy the temporal blessings more than others and finally will triumph over the earth in the kingdom of God."

4

Hungry for the Truth

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1-2).

"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Psalm 63:1).

I am convinced that it is almost impossible for us, in this land of plenty, to fully appreciate the statement, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst."

When Jesus spoke these words, the working man received very little pay for his work. The working man in Palestine was never far from real hunger, and in many instances actual starvation. When Jesus spoke these words, man did not have clear, cool water running into his house to which he had access by turning a tap.

Jesus is not speaking of a hunger that could be satisfied with a mid-morning snack. He is not talking about a thirst that could be satisfied with a cup of tea, or a cup of coffee. Jesus is speaking of the hunger of the man who is starving to death, and of the man who will die if he does not get water to drink.

We should want righteousness in our lives as a starving man wants food, or as a man dying of thirst wants water. Most people suffer from what Robert Louis Stevenson called

"The malady of not wanting." Just think how strong all of us would be if we wanted righteousness more than anything else in the world.

Someone has said that this beatitude could read like this: "O the bliss of the man who longs for total righteousness as a starving man longs for food, and a man perishing of thirst longs for water, for that man will truly be satisfied."

Hunger is a sign that the body needs food, and thirst is a sign that the body needs water. If man did not hunger and thirst, he would die. Just as pain is a sign that there is something wrong with the body, so hunger and thirst are signs that something is needed by the body.

It is sad indeed when one hungers and thirsts after something that will destroy his physical body. It is also possible for one to hunger and thirst after things that will destroy his spiritual life.

The prodigal son is an example of hungering and thirsting after those things that would destroy his soul. "And he said, a certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living" (Luke 15:11-13).

This young man had a strong desire and thirst for pleasures. No doubt, as long as the money lasted, he had plenty of good-weather friends. But one day he spent his last dime, and at this point he realized he had no friends. He hired himself to someone who put him to feeding swine. This was a very disgraceful thing for a Jew to do. His desires at this point were for the wrong thing.

When he reached the bottom, he began to hunger and thirst for righteousness. "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19).

John warns against hungering and thirsting after the world.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (First John 2:15-17).

No man can be righteous until he is right with God, right with self, and right with his fellowman. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12).

When one hungers and thirsts for God, then the inner man functions as God made it to function. The spiritual senses are exercised. "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

Seeking to please God and cultivating a hunger for righteousness brings about a remarkable change in our lives. We are what we read and meditate upon day and night.

One preacher gave the following illustration: a man had a dog that he loved very much. They would hunt together, and when lunch time came, he shared his lunch with the dog. They both drank out of the same spring. This was as far as they could go in sharing. The man loved music, but the dog did not share that love. He read the Bible and prayed, but the dog could not appreciate this. The man's dreams and desires were higher than that of the dog. So it is that a Christian's longings and desires are higher than those of the man of the world. The Christian hungers and thirsts after knowledge of God.

The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness wants his whole life made to conform to the teachings of Christ. He hungers to be filled with integrity, kindness, mercy and love, and everything else that goes to make him Christ-like in his life. He cannot rest until he knows that he has obeyed

God. He wants to be so Christ-like that sin does not control his life. He realizes when he is filled with righteousness that a covetous desire is theft, and that to hate his brother is murder. He hungers to obey God. He hungers to be born again. He hungers to put on the new man. He hungers and thirsts to have knowledge of what God would have him to do.

When a person hungers and thirsts after righteousness, he will gladly obey God. When God tells this man to believe, he will gladly do so because he hungers for righteousness. When God commands him to repent and confess, he will gladly do it. When God commands him to be baptized, he rejoices to do it. Why? Because he hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

The godly man hungers and thirsts to see righteousness in others. At times when he sees those who have no respect for God, he cries as did David in the long ago, "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword" (Psalm 57:4).

The more righteous a man is, the more sin vexes his soul. When he sees sin around him, he cries as did David in the long ago, "And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest" (Psalm 55:6-8).

The hunger and thirst are after righteousness. The man does not hunger for wealth. He had rather be poor and be righteous, than to be rich and be evil. He does not hunger after health. He had rather be sick and have righteousness, than to enjoy good health and be unrighteous. His hunger and thirst are after honesty, purity, and holiness. He hungers and thirsts to be what God would have him to be. Oh, to be holy, that should mean joy! Oh, to be pure in heart, that would bring honor! This is the blessed thirst.

When we hunger and thirst for the truth, we are crucified with Christ. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The most needed thing in the Lord's church today is a great crucifixion of the members. Many people are trying to live the Christian life without ever being crucified to the world. No man is knowledgeable enough, strong enough, or courageous enough to live the Christian life without being crucified with Christ.

Have you ever wondered how Paul could carry on his ministry in the face of persecution of all sorts? He had a great thirst for righteousness. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14).

When one hungers for righteousness, he will read the word of God, meditate on it, and make it a part of his life. A man is not hungry when he refuses wholesome food. When your child sits down at the table and says he does not want any dinner, he is evidently not hungry. When one refuses to study and meditate upon the word of God, it is because he is not hungry for the truths of God.

When a man sits down at the dinner table and begins to notice and to criticize, he is not hungry. He observes that one of the plates is chipped, one of the roses on the table is faded, the salt shaker is in the wrong place; no, this man is not hungry. When a person goes to church and he complains that the building was too cool or too hot, the service too long, or the preacher's tie did not match his suit, etc., this person is not hungry for the truth.

When the farmer has worked in the field all day long in the hot sun, he comes home hungry, tired and exhausted. When he sits down to eat, he does not complain or criticize. Why? He is hungry and eats what is set before him with a thankful heart.

When a person comes to the house of God, if he is thirsting for the truth, he does not sit and criticize. If the preacher is teaching the truth, the person enjoys it. The preacher may not be an orator, in fact, he may be a very poor speaker, but the listener is so hungry for the truth that he gets a great blessing from what the preacher says. The reason many members do not get a blessing from the service is because they do not hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The very first gospel meeting I conducted was near Jasper, Alabama. Brother Gus Nichols was the minister of the church in Jasper. The meeting was to last for ten days, and I was hoping that Brother Nichols would not attend. I was only twenty years old and knew so little. Brother Nichols was about fifty-five years old and knew so much. However, he attended just about every service of the meeting. We had a morning and evening service, and Brother Nichols was there morning and night sitting on the front pew. He would sit with his mouth about half open, never taking his eyes off me. The preaching must have been terrible in the way and manner it was presented. Why did Brother Nichols enjoy it? He had a great thirst for the truth.

If you do not enjoy Bible classes or preaching service, it might very well be that you do not hunger or thirst after righteousness. Oh, just think what our services would be like if everyone came to the house of God hungry and thirsty for the truth! Our church buildings would be filled, and we would evangelize the world in our lifetime.

While our Lord was upon the earth, He hungered after righteousness, longing to do His Father's will. "Jesus saith unto them, my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

When Jesus and His disciples came to Jacob's well, His disciples went into town to buy meat. Jesus was left alone at the well. A woman of Samaria came to the well to draw water. Jesus thirsted to teach this woman the truth. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24).

Righteousness brings happiness not only by sparing us the pain of sin and its consequences, but by purifying our hearts and minds and giving us an appetite for eternal life. "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15). "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

Adam Clarke makes the following comments on this verse: "As the body has its natural appetite of hunger and thirst for the food and drink suited to its nourishment, so has the soul. No being is indestructible or unfailing in its nature but God; no being is independent but Him; as the body depends for its nourishment, health and strength upon the earth, so does the soul upon heaven. Heavenly things cannot support the body; they are not suited to its nature; earthly things cannot support the soul, for the same reason. When the uneasy sensation termed hunger takes place in the stomach, we know we must get food or perish. When the soul is awakened to a sense of its wants, it begins to hunger and thirst after righteousness."

We have that wonderful promise of Jesus, that if we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we shall be filled.

5

Blessed Are the Merciful for They Shall Obtain Mercy

"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James 2:13).

". . . He that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness" (Romans 12:8).

When Jesus lived upon the earth, few people knew much about mercy. Slaves were treated like animals. The master could beat, sell, or even kill his slave and not one thing would be done about it. If a mother gave birth to a girl or a sickly baby, the father could reject the child, or even have it put to death.

Jesus taught and impressed upon the minds of the people that mercy was a great and admirable trait and not a weakness. While upon the earth He went about demonstrating to the world that His heart was touched and pained at the misery of others. He taught by His life that mercy was not a mere sentimental tenderness, but a love and concern that would motivate Him to take advantage of every opportunity to do good and to serve the unfortunate, the poor and the afflicted. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

Jesus taught by word and by His life the meaning of mercy. He taught that mercy was a revelation of power and not weakness. Our Lord went out of His way to teach and to show mercy. He had mercy on the poor, the downcast, and the brokenhearted.

John the eighth chapter is a beautiful example of mercy and forgiveness.

"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:3-11).

Jesus did not approve of the sin that the woman committed, but He showed mercy and forgave her. Before there can be forgiveness, there must be mercy. Jesus first had mercy on the woman and then forgave her. The reason so many are so unforgiving is that they are not *merciful.* There can be no forgiveness without mercy.

Shakespeare said, "The quality of mercy is not strained: It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath."

One of the most beautiful statements in the book of Lamentations is found in chapter 3: "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:21-23). It is such a great encouragement to serve God and to know that when we arise every morning God's mercy and compassion are new as we start the day.

"And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him" (Luke 10:30-33).

The lesson that Jesus taught here is a beautiful illustration of mercy on the part of the Samaritan. The priest had been up to Jerusalem telling the people how to conduct themselves, and the Levite had been up to Jerusalem copying the law for the people. When they saw the man lying there half dead, they passed by on the other side.

From a human standpoint they could justify what they did and make it look good in the eyes of man. They could have said, "We have been away from home for several weeks and are homesick. If we get involved with this man, it could delay us for hours or days." So they passed by on the other side.

They could have said, "The sight of blood makes us sick. If we begin to minister to him, there will be more people lying here." So they passed by on the other side.

They could have said, "If we stop and try to help him, the men who robbed him will attack us. They may have hidden themselves, thinking that someone will come along to assist this man. If we should be attacked, they might kill us."

Man may offer a thousand excuses for not helping the poor and unfortunate, but the basic reason for not doing it is the lack of mercy. The Samaritan had mercy on the man and helped him.

When Jesus healed the ten lepers, it was a demonstration of His mercy. When we talk about the misfortunes of others and do nothing about it, this is not mercy. Mercy is compassion in action. If my neighbor's house burned, and I talk about what a terrible tragedy and great loss this is to the man, and I do nothing about it, I have not shown mercy. But if I go and assist him, this is mercy in action. It is possible for one to have a sentimental feeling toward people in an abstract way, and yet be a complete failure as far as personally helping or assisting the person in need.

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). What are we doing when we help another man bear his burden? We are showing mercy to this person.

The spirit of mercy is a spirit of compassion toward men in their sorrows. The purpose of mercy is not to inflict pain, but to relieve it. We must remember that when people are in trouble, and we speak words that tend to hurt them more, we are living contrary to what Jesus taught. We are to be merciful in passing judgment on others. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

When we talk about mercy, we want it and know that we must receive it from God in order to be saved. But yet we can be so cruel and unmerciful toward others. James tells us that if we do not show mercy toward others, then God will show no mercy toward us. This is a shocking and fearful statement. When we realize how much mercy God must show toward us in order to save us, this should motivate all of us to be more merciful.

Mercy is not a trait with which we are born, rather a grace that is acquired through study, meditation and prayer. Many are like the man whom Jesus told about in the following parable.

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:23-35).

Just think of the mistakes and the sins we commit! Think of the times that we, through our weakness or lack of knowledge, sin against God, and we plead for God to have mercy upon us, and He does. Then someone, in a very small way, sins against us, and, so many times, we refuse to show mercy. We must remember that we have sinned against God, as the parable teaches, "one thousand talents," while one brother has sinned against us "one hundred pence."

Since I know that my going to heaven depends upon the mercy of God, and since James said if I do not show mercy, God will not show or have any mercy on me, then I must be understanding, kind, and merciful to others before God will be merciful to me. All of us should strive to live in such a way that God will have judgment with mercy.

When mercy and truth meet, there is suffering. The one extending mercy suffers because he experiences the hurt caused by his enemy; the one receiving mercy suffers as he realizes what he has done and repents of his sin. Whenever you are dealing with sin, there is going to be pain. But mercy heals the wound.

History tells of Queen Victoria of England being close friends with a commoner, Mrs. Tullock. Their husbands died about the same time. Unannounced, the queen made a visit to Mrs. Tullock and found her lying on a couch resting. As Mrs. Tullock struggled to rise quickly from her couch to greet the queen, the queen stepped forward and said, "Don't rise! I am not coming to you today as a queen to a subject, but as one woman to another who has just lost her husband."

This is what Jesus did. He did not come to us as a remote, detached, isolated person, but as a man, "made in all things like unto his brethren" (Hebrews 2:17).

I wish that I could so indelibly impress this truth upon your mind, that those who show mercy are the ones and only ones who will receive mercy from our heavenly Father. "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly" (Proverbs 18:24). If we are detached and disinterested in people, they will be detached and disinterested in us. If they see that we care, their hearts will respond in caring.

Someone has said that this beatitude could be translated in the following way: "O the bliss of the man who gets right inside other people, until he can see with their eyes, think with their thoughts, feel with their feelings, for he who does that will find others doing the same for him."

When we are merciful we care about the welfare of others. We are merciful when we seek to lead people to Christ. We are merciful when we try to restore those who have fallen by the wayside. We are merciful when we labor to bring about the repentance of those who have sinned against us personally. We are merciful when we work and pray with those who are weak and have fallen. We are merciful when we do all within our power to restore them to their first love. Since the spirit of mercy is that of compassion toward men in their sorrow, suffering and want, with the desire to do them good and only good, we must realize that all forms of cruelty are diametrically opposed to mercy. The purpose of mercy is not to inflict pain but to relieve it, not to harm, but to heal.

We must remember that cruel words are never spoken by those who show mercy. Words can be very unkind and hurtful.

To fully appreciate this beatitude, we must know something about the cruelty that was practiced in the ancient world. In One B.C., Hilarion wrote to his wife, Alis, the following: "I want you to know that we are still in Alexandria. Don't worry if, when they all go home, I stay in Alexandria. I beg and entreat you, take care of the little child; and, as soon as we get our pay, I will send it to you. If you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out."

Stobaeus said, "The poor man raises his sons, but the daughter, if one is poor, we expose."

Aristotle laid down this rule: "Let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared."

Seneca wrote, "Mad dogs we knock on the head; the fierce and savage oxen we slay; sickly sheep we put to the knife to keep them from infecting the flock; unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown even children, children who at birth are weakly and abnormal. It is not anger but reason which separates the harmful from the sound."

Is it any wonder, then, that Christ said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."

The Christian must receive the mercy of God in order to be saved, but it is only as he is merciful that he shall receive mercy. "With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful" (Psalm 18:25). "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard" (Proverbs 21:13).

Let us all learn to be more merciful.

6

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

The heart in this beatitude involves that part of man which comprehends his mind, will and emotion. The word *pure* means clean, pure, unsoiled.

The Jews' religion was an outward religion, and almost exclusively ceremonial or ritualistic. The heart, the inward man, had nothing to do with it. If a man kept the external ceremonies and rituals, he was considered pure. Jesus taught over and over that their worship was no good unless their hearts were right with God.

The Pharisees were very meticulous in observing rituals. They paid tithe of mint, anise, and cummin. They would strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Christ said that they made clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within, they were full of extortion and excess.

Jesus Christ, in speaking of these Pharisees, said, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:7-8).

One may attend all the services of the church, but unless his heart is pure, it does him no good. One may visit the sick and help the poor, but unless he is motivated by a pure heart, it is all in vain. A pure heart is a prerequisite to true worship, or whatever we do in the name of the Lord.

Sometimes the Bible uses the word heart to indicate emotions. "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1). The heart can also refer to the intellect. "Why reason these things in your hearts?'' (Mark 2:8). The heart sometimes indicates the volitional function, the will. ''But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself'' (Daniel 1:8).

When we put all these verses together, we learn that the heart is the inner man with many functions. The heart is the master control of our lives. ''Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life'' (Proverbs 4:23). The Pharisees, in trying to please God, ignored the heart and majored on outward actions. But one's worship to God must come from the heart.

Jesus said, ''For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies'' (Matthew 15:19). The law of Moses said, ''Thou shalt not commit adultery.'' But when Jesus was talking about this, He said, ''Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart'' (Matthew 5:28).

There is no doubt about it, we become what our minds feed upon. No one knew this better than did Paul. When he wrote to the church at Philippi, he said, ''Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things'' (Philippians 4:8).

We become physically what we eat, and we become spiritually what our minds feed upon. Solomon said in the long ago, ''As thinketh in his heart, so is he'' (Proverbs 23:7).

Our hearts are purified by obeying the truth: ''Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently'' (First Peter 1:22). Purity of heart and understanding the law of God go hand in hand. We need to read, study and meditate upon the law of God with a pure heart.

When David was talking about the good man, he said, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:2). "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalm 19:8). "Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus 1:15).

The person with a pure heart always puts the best interpretation upon what he hears. The person with an impure heart would put the worst interpretation upon what he hears. Oh, how we all need to strive every day to keep our hearts pure. The person with a pure heart always wants to do right, and he delights in the law of the Lord. Purity of heart is essential to being a Christian, and there can be no purity of life without a pure heart, for out of the heart flows the issues of life.

A pure heart avoids the very appearance of evil. The pure heart is in love with purity. The heart may be compared to a large reservoir which supplies a large town with its many streets and thousands of houses. The water goes to the people through thousands of pipes. If the water in the reservoir is pure, it will be conveyed in its purity through the pipes to the inhabitants; but if the water in the reservoir has poison in it, when it reaches its destination, it will be poison and will kill those who drink it. The heart is the reservoir from which life flows. Let us think of our hands, feet, looks, actions, as being the pipes. If the heart is pure, purity will be manifested in our lives.

The pure heart is one that is free of sinful thinking. A substance is called pure when it is without admixture, when it is one thing, and not two or more. Pure gold is gold without alloy. Purity of heart means that single eye to the glory of God which aims to be well pleasing to God. The pure in heart craves no recognition other than that which the Lord will give.

The pure heart is a converted heart. One cannot have a heart of moral purity and of singleness of motive in the service of God unless he has a converted heart, a heart that has been cleansed from guilt of sin through obedience to God's law. "And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). How is the heart purified? It is done by obeying the law of God; having enough faith to do what God commands. "I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). When one repents of his sins, his heart is being purified by faith.

The heart is being purified in confession. "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

The individual with a pure heart wants to be baptized because the Lord commanded it. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days" (Acts 10:48). Now, in the light of these scriptures, can one claim to have a pure heart when he refuses to obey these commands?

The presence of God's teaching in our hearts and the influence of it drives out the evil and insincerity. It is the power of the Word and God's grace that frees the sinner's heart from the guilt of sin, and it is also the power of the Word and the grace of God that keeps the heart pure. There can be no purity of heart without the Word and also Christ living in our hearts.

The heart is the source of all trouble. We are prone to blame people and circumstances for the wrong things that we do, but the heart is the right one to blame. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Through many centuries man's heart has not changed. Even before the flood man's heart was evil. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). "And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord" (Jeremiah 24:7).

One cannot read the Psalms without learning that David cultivated his heart. "My heart is inditing a good matter" (Psalm 45:1). "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song I will praise him" (Psalm 28:7). "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart" (Psalm 26:2). "I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works" (Psalm 9:1).

What was David's secret? "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise" (Psalm 57:7). David set his heart on God and sought to honor Him. The highest joy of man comes from cultivating the deepest part of man — the heart.

Integrity of heart was a passionate concern of David, as is witnessed by many statements in the Psalms. "Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the Lord; therefore I shall not slide" (Psalm 26:1). "But as for me, I will walk in mine integrity: redeem me, and be merciful unto me" (Psalm 26:11). "Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name" (Psalm 86:11).

How do we maintain this integrity of heart? By being honest with God, with ourselves, and with our fellowman. When one studies the life of David, one sees a man who sought to live openly and honestly before God and his fellowman. It is true that David made mistakes, but he was a very penitent man. When one reads the Psalms of David, he realizes that David was honest with his God and poured his heart out to Him.

"For they shall see God." No greater privilege can be enjoyed than to come into the presence of God. In ancient times it was a great honor to see the face of the king. The queen of Sheba said to Solomon, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom" (First Kings 10:8). But however great was the desire of men to see an earthly potentate, their desire to see the living God was much greater. Moses pleaded, ". . . show me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18).

The blessings in the beatitudes are not only future blessings, but also present blessings. It is not with the physical eye that man sees God. "There shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). How then do the pure in heart see God? They see Him with the eyes of the heart. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened" (Ephesians 1:18).

To see God is to enjoy Him, to enjoy His presence. When Jesus was talking to Nicodemus, He said to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). One cannot enjoy the kingdom of God, or receive the spiritual blessings in the kingdom, unless he is born again.

When the pure in heart see God, they experience a joy that only those in Christ Jesus experience. When the pure in heart see God, they get a blessing and enjoyment out of attending the services, visiting the sick, helping the poor, and doing good unto all men.

H. Leo Boles says concerning "they shall see God," "Of all one's senses, that of sight comes nearest perfection — gives us a clearer, fuller knowledge of its objects, than any of the senses. Hence, transferring it from the physical to the mental and spiritual, it should express a better apprehension — a clearer knowledge of God than any other illustration possible from the material world. Not only do the pure in heart see God here, but they shall see Him face to face." "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'' (First John 3:2).

To see God is to have fellowship with Him. So often we read this beatitude and postpone its promise to the next world. It is certainly true that the pure in heart will see God in heaven, but they also see Him now. We see God as we fellowship with Him. The truth is, if we do not see God here, we will not see Him in heaven.

7

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1).

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15).

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

We are living in a world that is filled with strife and division. There is much strife among the nations of the world. There is strife in the political world. We see much strife and division in the religious world. We even see the church of our Lord torn and bleeding from division.

What a tragedy it is to see people wearing the name of Christ, members of His body, torn asunder by bitterness and unkindness!

Man's greatest realization of peace is to be found in a right relationship with God. Before one can be a peacemaker, he must first be at peace with God.

"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21).

We are to teach and to influence man to make peace with God. No man can be at peace with God until he obeys the teachings of God.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

This is active faith that leads one to obey God. The faith that saves is the faith that leads one to repent and to be baptized upon a confession of his faith.

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (Second Corinthians 5:19-20).

There is a battle that rages in man between the body and the spirit, if the person is unconverted. But when one is converted to Christ, he can say as did Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

When man is reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ, he is also reconciled to his brethren. When we have peace with God, we have peace with each other.

"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:14-19).

"Blessed are the peacemakers." Peace does not just happen. We make peace. In fact, we have to put forth a special effort in order to have peace. We cannot have peace by avoiding issues or sweeping things "under the rug." We have peace by facing the issues and dealing with them in love and kindness.

We are to endeavor to keep peace. The word *endeavor* means "to make an earnest attempt, to try to achieve."

"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

We need peacemakers because peace never comes of itself. Where there is peace, someone made it. We may drift into strife; we may drift into trouble and division; but if peace is ever brought about, it is through conscious, persistent, sacrificial effort. We must do more than just talk about peace; we are to make it.

Every member of the Lord's body should be a peacemaker. It is impossible for everyone to become a great speaker. Everybody cannot be a great song leader, or an outstanding Bible teacher. Everyone cannot have a great name, but all of us can be something far better: we can be peacemakers. Oh, how wonderful it would be if every church member would resolve to be a peacemaker!

We must remember that our Lord was a great peacemaker. "He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us" (Ephesians 2:14). Christ made peace by His sacrificial death on the cross. As He faced the tortures of Calvary, Jesus was able to say to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27). Our God is the God of peace, and our Saviour is the Prince of Peace. If you and I are going to be peacemakers, we must pattern our lives after Jesus Christ, who was the Prince of all Peacemakers.

Let us notice some Bible examples of peacemakers.

Abraham was a great peacemaker. When Abraham was called upon to leave his native land and travel into a strange country, he took his immediate family, his father, and his nephew Lot. After many years both Abraham and Lot became wealthy men.

"And Lot also, which went with Abraham, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" (Genesis 13:5-9).

Abraham had every human right to tell Lot that he had made Lot what he was. Abraham could have said, "I am the one who will take what I want, and you can have the other or what is left."

If we all were as interested in peace as we are in getting our rights, the church would be united instead of being splintered into so many different groups.

Abraham loved peace and was willing to sacrifice to promote it. It is so sad to realize that the church has been divided into so many warring camps that in many communities the church has no influence for good. We can fuss and fight over small, insignificant matters, but do not seem to get upset over dividing the body of Christ. Christ would say concerning such people, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Matthew 23:24-25).

If we were as concerned about the lost and as concerned about taking the gospel to them, and spent as much time in evangelizing the world as we do in arguing and splitting hairs over insignificant matters, we could evangelize the world in a short time. But the great and important things do not seem to disturb us. How many churches have you known to fuss, fight, and divide because we are not carrying out the worldwide commission? (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). You have never heard of one, have you?

L.L. Brigance, one of my Bible and church history teachers at Freed-Hardeman College, said, "In the history of the world there is, perhaps, no more conspicuous example of inconsistency and hypocrisy than the Pharisees. They were so scrupulous about little things and so unscrupulous about big things; so particular about gnats and so indifferent to camels. They were like a man standing in the midst of a great landscape who sees the pebbles at his feet, but cannot see the mountains, rivers and valleys around him. They could hear the chirp of the cricket a few feet away, but could not hear the rolling of the thunder in gathering clouds. Their religion was blind, bigoted, narrow and hypocritical. They gave their time and attention to little things, to relatively unimportant things, and left undone the things that mattered most. Their religion was negative and destructive. It consisted in objections and fault-finding, and in splitting hairs. The emphasis should be placed where it belongs, that is, on the most important things, and not on the difference between tweedledum and tweedledee."

Jonathan was a peacemaker. Jonathan was very fond of David. When Saul told Jonathan and all his servants that he planned to kill David, this upset Jonathan because he delighted much in David. Notice how Jonathan tried to bring about peace.

"And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good" (First Samuel 19:4).

We should do all within our power to promote peace. Peace is a wonderful and beautiful thing, but we can never compromise the truth in order to have peace. We cannot condone wrong in order to have peace. We cannot have peace at any price. Peace at the expense of truth is never right. We cannot sweep error "under the rug."

But much of the division that I have witnessed in my forty-five years of preaching has been over personalities. Let me give you an example. A few days ago, I read in the paper about a gospel preacher who was going to wash the feet of another brother to teach a lesson on humility. I do not condemn this act if it was being done, not as an act of worship, but to teach a lesson on humility. It would, no doubt, be a powerful lesson on learning to serve one another. But I am of the opinion that if certain preachers in the brotherhood had done this in a church service, preachers and editors would have jumped on him with all four feet. Brethren, by what law are we living when some can do it, and some cannot do it?

I read in a bulletin that came to my desk that the preacher of a certain congregation was announcing a fast of so many hours, and all were welcomed to join in the fast. If a brother wants to fast, go to it; however, I have never thought that a person ought to advertise his fasting. It is so much like the Pharisees to go around telling everybody about it. Yes, it is Pharisaical to put it in the bulletin, because they want all of the people to know that they, over there, are fasting.

Christ would say, "Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face" (Matthew 6:16-17).

As far as I know there was no one who condemned these brethren for encouraging the whole church to fast. If people are fasting, not to put on a show for the brotherhood, but because of sincerity, I do not condemn them. Again, I am of the opinion that if some other church or preacher had advocated fasting, they would, no doubt, have been written up by many preachers. So, you see, my friend, that much of the trouble, confusion, and division in the church is not over doctrinal matters but personalities.

All should strive to be peacemakers, "for they shall be called children of God."

When Solomon mentioned the six things that God hates, one of them is, "He that soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:19).

8

Blessed Are the Persecuted

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10).

In order for one to understand this beatitude, it is necessary to know the difference in punishment and persecution. Many people get the two words confused. Persecution means "to cause to suffer because of belief." A man has good morals and is a good citizen, but suffers because of his conviction.

Punishment means "to impose a penalty on for a fault or offence, or violation." The man who attempted to assassinate Governor George Wallace is not being persecuted, but is being punished for a dastardly crime that he committed.

The apostle Peter tells us that one may suffer as a murderer. Many people are on death row waiting to be put to death for some murder which they committed. One may suffer as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters (First Peter 4:15). When a person has to suffer for committing murder, or being an evildoer, or a busybody, he has brought these things on himself, and he must be punished to protect society.

Many times a man has to suffer, not because he has done anything wrong, but he may have to suffer because he obeys God; because he lives the Christian life; and because he wears the name Christian. Peter said do not be ashamed but glorify God in this name (First Peter 4:16).

Someone has said, "We are punished by good men for doing evil, and we are persecuted by bad men for doing good."

If I get into trouble because I am a busybody, this is not persecution. If I am promoting V.P. Black and get into trouble, this is not persecution. If I am ugly, arrogant, and abusive in trying to teach people about Christ, and they reject me, this is not persecution. I have brought these things upon myself. But if I am doing my best to live right and promote Christ and His church, and if I suffer for doing these good works, this is persecution.

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (First Peter 4:12-13).

"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

It is said that Polycarp was told if he would swear and reproach Christ, he could go free. Polycarp replied, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, who hath saved me?"

In all probability this eighth beatitude is the most difficult for us to understand because most of us cannot identify with it.

The members of the church are seldom persecuted today. The reason for so little persecution today is because much of the preaching being done from the pulpit and on television does not disturb anyone, not even the devil. So much preaching today is not in opposition to the world and false teaching. Such preachers will never collide with the devil because they both are going in the same direction. For man and the devil to collide they would have to be going in opposite directions. The Christian is going one way, and the world is going another way.

We may not be able to fully comprehend the eighth beatitude, but oh, what it meant to those early Christians! When the apostles were healing the sick and casting out unclean spirits in Jerusalem, the Sadducees were filled with indignation, and put the apostles in prison (Acts 5:17-18).

They brought the apostles and set them before the council, and the high priest asked them, saying, "Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28).

It was on this occasion that Gamaliel made a great speech. The substance of his speech was this: If this doctrine that these men are teaching is from men, it will come to nought. He then gave some examples of such teaching. Then Gamaliel said to them, If this thing that these men are teaching is from God, you cannot overthrow it, and you will find yourselves fighting against God. They then called the apostles in and beat them, and commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus.

"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41).

How could they rejoice after such persecution? They remembered the teaching of Jesus, and, no doubt, recalled the time and place when Jesus said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." They, at this point in their ministry, had a full understanding of what Jesus meant when He spoke these words.

Paul had a full understanding of the eighth beatitude. Listen to him. "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (Second Corinthians 11:24-28).

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth'' (Hebrews 11:32-38).

True persecution comes ''for righteousness' sake.'' It is the result of the child of God trying, to the best of his ability, to live the beatitudes. The philosophy of the man of the world is just opposite of what Jesus taught.

The people, whom we have mentioned in this lesson, did not have to suffer persecution. They could have compromised the truth and been popular with the very ones who persecuted them. They chose to please God. We need more preachers in the pulpit and on television whose desire is to please God rather than pleasing the world.

''For theirs is the kingdom of heaven''; those who believed on Christ, repented of their sins, confessed the name of Christ, and were baptized into His body enjoyed the spiritual blessings that are in the kingdom. Those who are in the kingdom act like a child of the King and not as a slave.

Those early Christians did not retaliate because Jesus had taught them how to live even in the face of persecution.

''Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you'' (Matthew 5:43-44). Notice verse 45, ''That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.''

When one is able to exercise self-control in the midst of persecution and pray for his persecutors and do good to them, he has reached spiritual maturity. It does not matter how few of the material things of this world he may have; he enjoys those spiritual blessings in the kingdom of God.

When one is persecuted for obeying God, he can identify with the Old Testament prophets who were oftentimes beaten, stoned and thrown into prison. He can also be identified with those Christians of the first century. What a great honor to be associated with such a holy band of saints. Paul would say of such people, ''Of whom the world was not worthy.'' The company we keep tells the world something about our character.

This is the last of the beatitudes, in many ways the climax of them all. It is so hard for us to understand, and possibly we can never understand, why men would persecute the good Christian person who harms no one; the person who is meek, humble, good; the one who is merciful and trying to make peace.

Someone has said, ''The dedication of the saints only magnifies the depravity of the sinners.''

The world extends a hand to the person who will compromise the truth, but tends to hate the man who is set on doing the will of God.

9

The Right Attitude Toward Obedience

The Bible places great emphasis upon obedience.

"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

"And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubborness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (First Samuel 15:22-23).

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32).

"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in *all things* whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:22-23).

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness'' (Romans 6:16-18).

''And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power'' (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

''Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him'' (Hebrews 5:8-9).

''Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city'' (Revelation 22:14).

No one can read these verses without being impressed with the fact that God places great emphasis upon obedience.

I. **When one has the right attitude toward obedience, he will obey God in spite of inconvenience.**

I don't think it is ever convenient for one to obey the gospel. The devil will look after that, and make it inconvenient for one to obey God. It is never convenient for a wayward church member to be restored to his first love, but if he has the right attitude toward obedience, he will obey God in spite of inconvenience.

Millions of people have been lost, not because they did not understand the plan of salvation; not because they did not know what to do, but because it was not convenient to do so.

In Acts the twenty-fourth chapter, we have an example of Governor Felix who said it was not convenient. The Jews had employed an orator by the name of Tertullus to represent them. Tertullus commended Felix by saying, "Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence." He said a few other complimentary things about Felix, and then brought four charges against Paul: (1) Paul was a pestilent fellow; (2) He was a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world; (3) He was ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; (4) He had profaned the temple.

Tertullus said, "We would have tried Paul according to our law, but Lysias came upon us, and by great force took him out of our hands, and commanded his accusers to come unto thee." The Jews who came with Tertullus said these things were so.

After Tertullus made his speech, Paul was permitted to speak. He, also, commended Felix by saying, "Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do more cheerfully answer for myself." Paul then said, there had been only twelve days since he went up to Jerusalem for to worship. He said that they neither found him in the temple disputing with any man; neither raising up the people; neither in the synagogue nor in the city, and they could not prove the things whereof they accused him. But this he confessed unto them, "That after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my Fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets that taught that there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." Paul said that after many years he came to Jerusalem to bring arms to his people, and while there the Jews from Asia found him purified in the temple. He was not with a multitude, nor was he creating trouble.

Then Paul said to Felix, "Why art my accusers here if they have ought against me? Let these who are here say if they have found any evil in me while I stood before the council. It is because of what I have taught concerning the resurrection of the dead. I have been preaching only what the law and prophets said would come to pass."

Felix commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty that his friends might visit or minister unto him.

After some days Felix and his wife, Drusilla, sent for Paul to hear more about his faith in Christ Jesus.

When Paul stood before Felix and his wife, he preached to them about righteousness, temperance and the judgment to come. Observe what Paul did. He realizes he is on trial for his life, but he talks to Felix about righteousness. Felix had been reared as a slave in the brick fields of Egypt, and through politics he became governor of a Roman province. Paul, no doubt, talked to him about treating others as he would like to be treated. He may have told Felix what Jesus said in Matthew 7:12, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

After he talked to Felix for awhile about righteousness, he got on the subject of temperance. He may have told Felix that he should discipline his body and bring it into subjection. Here is a man who, according to history, had unbridled every lust, and now he is hearing a man talk to him about self-control.

When Paul finished his remarks about temperance, he began to talk about the judgment day. He possibly told Felix that just as you are a judge over these people, you must remember that one day you are going to stand before the Judge of all judges. Why did Paul preach to Felix about righteousness, temperance and the judgment to come? Because he was telling Felix what he needed to hear, and not what he would like to hear. I fear that many preachers in our own pulpits are telling people what they know the people want to hear instead of telling them what they know the people need to hear. Oh, how different these preachers are from the apostle Paul. If a preacher is a true man of God, he will always tell people what they need to hear, even though he knows it is not what they would like to hear.

It would be interesting to hear all the speech that Paul made that day. We only have the outline. It was so powerful that

Felix began to tremble, and he said to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." As far as we know that convenient season never did come.

The twenty-sixth chapter of Acts tells of Paul appearing before Agrippa. Paul said to Agrippa, "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews."

Paul begins to tell Agrippa about his own life. "My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." He was now being tried because of the promise that God made to his fathers that God would raise the dead.

Then Paul asked Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead? I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus. Which things I did in Jerusalem and many of the saints I shut up in prison, and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them. I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme. I persecuted these Christians even to strange cities."

When Paul heard there were Christians in Damascus, he got authority from the chief priests to go there and persecute these Christians. It would not, at this point, have bothered Paul's conscience to have taken some expectant mother and bound her to the whipping post and compelled her to blaspheme the name of Christ.

On his way to Damascus Paul saw a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun. He fell to the ground and those with him also fell to the ground. Paul said, "I heard a voice speaking to me, and saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks, and I said, Who art thou Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."

The Lord told Saul to stand up, that He had appeared unto him to make him a minister and witness of the things he had seen and heard; to open the eyes of the people and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the power of God.

Paul reasoned with Agrippa by telling him that he was not disobedient to that heavenly vision. He said he preached the gospel at Damascus, then Jerusalem, and throughout all the coast of Judea. For this cause the Jews caught him in the temple and went about to kill him. He had been preaching what the law and the prophets said would come to pass; that Christ would suffer, die, and be raised from the dead.

Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Paul replied, "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."

Paul said that the king knew these things for they were not done in a corner. Then Paul said, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." But as far as the Bible reveals, Agrippa never obeyed the gospel. Why? It was not convenient for him to do so.

Matthew tells of one who was very close to the kingdom, but did not enter. This is where a rich young ruler came running to Jesus, wanting to know what to do to have eternal life. Jesus said to this young man, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, all these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions'' (Matthew 19:17-22).

Here is a young man who was so good morally. He was also rich, young, humble, and a ruler. He was standing on the top step that led to the Kingdom of God. He had his hand on the door knob that opened the door to the Kingdom of God. But he turned and walked away sorrowful because he had great possessions. It was not convenient for him to do what the Lord told him to do that he might enter into the Kingdom of God.

II. **When one has the right attitude toward obedience, he will obey God regardless of what others may do.**

''Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'' (Joshua 24:14-15).

Joshua was telling the whole world, that regardless of what other people did, he and his house were going to serve God. I am sure it was not convenient for Joshua to remain faithful to God when there were those all around worshipping idols. Regardless of what others did, he was going to worship the true God because this was right. It may not have been convenient, but it was right.

In about 1947 there was a gospel preacher conducting a gospel meeting in the state of Florida. This revival was being conducted in a community where there was not a congregation of God's people. There was not a church building in this community, so the revival was being conducted under a tent.

There was a young, blind boy of seventeen who listened daily to this preacher on the radio. He called the preacher and told him that he would go to worship with him if the preacher would pick him up. The preacher told the young man that he would be glad to do so. The young blind man attended several services of the meeting and learned what to do to be saved.

He told his parents that he had learned the truth and was going to obey the gospel. His father was so prejudicial that he told the young man that if he did obey the gospel, he could not come home. What would you have done in a situation like this? Here is a young boy, blind from birth, being told that if he becomes a member of the church, he cannot come home. The young man said, "It is the truth. I must obey it." And he did. The father kept his word. The young man was not permitted to go home. He lived with members of the church for several months before he was permitted to go home. Since those days, this young man has baptized his parents, his brothers and sisters, and most of his people. Now, suppose he should have said, "I know it is right, but my parents are opposed to it, if they would obey the gospel, then I would." So if the young man had not obeyed the gospel, all of them would have been lost.

The most foolish thing a person can say is this: "I will obey the gospel if my husband will, or if my wife will obey it. I will obey the gospel if my father or mother, or friends will obey." My friend, it is an individual matter.

A few years ago, I was conducting a revival in a northern city. I had the evening meal with an Italian couple. While we were eating, she said that when they were moving into the house where they were then living, the lady next door brought food to them. The lady was a member of the Church of Christ. She invited the Italian lady to the services of the church. The Italian lady said that the neighbor was so nice to her that she could not say no, but she really had no intention of going. The Italian lady said that every time the lady next door talked to her, she would always invite her, in a nice way, to attend church services with her.

I shall never forget that she said one cold Sunday morning there was a big snow covering the ground. The Italian lady thought, "This neighbor won't go to church today." But about 9:30 that morning, the lady next door waded through the snow with her children, got into her car and went to worship. The Italian lady said, "I guess that is the day that I made up my mind that I was going with her. After going with her a few times, I learned the truth. I told my husband that I was going to obey the gospel, and he forbade me to do it. I told him it was the truth, and I had to obey it. I did obey the gospel, and my husband had nothing to do with me for six months." Her husband was sitting there hearing what she said. At the time she was telling me about this, her husband had obeyed the gospel and was a deacon in the church. Now, suppose she had said, "I know it is the truth, but my husband does not want me to obey it, but if he will, then I will do it." They both might have been lost forever. We want everybody to obey the gospel, but when others refuse to do so, we must do it regardless of what others may do.

III. **When one has the right attitude toward obedience, he will obey even though he can see no human reasoning or logic in doing what God commanded.**

"For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (First Corinthians 1:18-21).

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts'' (Isaiah 55:6-9).

The fifth chapter of Second Kings tells us about Captain Naaman. He is described as a great man, an honourable man, and a mighty man. In fact, he was such a great honourable man that God gave deliverance to Syria because of Captain Naaman, but he was a leper. His wife knew he was a leper; his neighbors knew he was a leper; the king knew he was a leper; and Naaman knew he was a leper. A person has to admit that he is a sinner before he will do anything about it.

Captain Naaman had captured a little girl out of the land of Israel, and she waited on Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, ''Would God my Lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.''

Now, let us notice how people get things mixed up. When the King of Syria heard this, he said he would write a letter to the King of Israel and tell him to heal Naaman. This is not what the little girl said. She said there was a prophet who can heal him. I suppose the King of Syria reasoned as most religious people reason today; that is, it does not matter as long as you are doing what you think you ought to do, or doing what seems right in your own heart (Proverbs 14:12).

The King of Syria wrote a letter to the King of Israel and told him that he had sent Captain Naaman to him for the king to heal him of leprosy. He also sent about seventy thousand dollars (in our money) and ten changes of raiment. The letter said, ''Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.''

When the King of Israel read the letter, he became angry, rent his clothes, and said, ''Am I God, to kill and to make alive that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.''

When Elisha heard about this, he send word for them to send the Captain to see him. Naaman and those with him went and stood before the door of the house of Elisha. Elisha did not go out himself, but sent a messenger who told Naaman to go and wash (or dip) seven times in the river Jordan, and then he would be clean. When Naaman was told to go dip in the river Jordan seven times, he became angry and was going away. Naaman said, "I thought that he would come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place and I would be healed. He did not do this."

Naaman did some human reasoning. He thought, "If I must dip in water, why not go back and dip in Abana and Pharpar, they are better than all the waters of Israel." If I had been there, and Naaman had asked me, "Don't you think water is water? Don't you think the water of Damascus is just as good as the water of Israel?" I will admit that from a human standpoint, or from a logical standpoint the water of Damascus was as good, maybe better, than the water of Israel, but we must remember that God, through the prophet, told him to dip in the river Jordan. My friend, we must remember, we walk by faith (Second Corinthians 5:7).

There are many things that God commands us to do that I can understand from a human standpoint or from a logical standpoint. There are some things God commands us to do that from human reasoning or logic I cannot understand, and no man on God's earth can understand. I cannot understand from reasoning or logic how an alien sinner can go down into the water and be buried in that water and come up out of that water with all his sins washed away. God Almighty says that is just exactly what takes place. (Read Acts 2:38; 22:16; First Peter 3:21; Romans 6:1-4.)

While Naaman was wroth and going away, his servants talked to him. They said to Naaman, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?" Naaman was a great, mighty and honourable man, he would not lie. Yes, but if he had been told by the messenger to do something great, such as a parade, he would have done it. But he was told to dip in the river Jordan seven times.

At this point, Naaman decides to do what the prophet told him to do. He goes down into the river Jordan and dips one time. The leprosy is still there. He dips the second time. The leprosy is still there. He dips the third, fourth, fifth, and the sixth time. He looks and the leprosy is still there. Now, suppose Naaman had said, "Enough is enough. I have dipped six times, and I can see no change. I am not going to dip again." My friend, regardless of what you may be religiously, do you believe he would have been healed? Now notice, he goes down the seventh time, comes up out of the water, and his skin is like that of a baby. We must remember that Naaman was healed after he obeyed God.

We are told that God said to Joshua, "I have given into thine hand Jericho." Let us see how God gave Jericho to Joshua. The Lord told Joshua to take his army and march around the city one time each day for six days. The seventh day Joshua was to march around the city seven times. "And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat." My friend, figure that one out by logic. We must remember that it was when they obeyed God that the wall fell. Remember this: When we have the right attitude toward obedience, we will obey God even though we cannot from wisdom or logic understand why God said do a certain thing. We walk by faith. When one has the right attitude, he will never, no never, question anything that God commands, but will try his very best to do what God has commanded.

IV. **When one has the right attitude toward obedience, he will obey immediately.**

On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached, about three thousand people obeyed the gospel that day.

We read in Acts chapter eight about the conversion of the

Ethiopian eunuch. "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (Acts 8:26-38). Acts the sixteenth chapter is another example. When the Philippian jailor learned what to do, we are told he was baptized the same hour of the night (Acts 16:33).

If you have the right attitude toward obedience, why not come now believing on Christ, repenting of your sins, and be baptized this very hour while we stand and sing the invitation.

10

The Church

The church of our Lord is the most glorious institution in the world. The prophets of God prophesied about the church hundreds of years before the church was established. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:2-3).

I want to talk about the church in a way that one can easily understand. I will discuss the construction, the composition, the cost, the creed, and the commission of the church.

I. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH

The church of the New Testament was built by Jesus Christ. "When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'' (Matthew 16:13-19).

If there were no other statement in the Bible concerning the founder and builder of the church, the fact that Jesus said He was going to build His church, is enough to convince anyone who respects the Word of God, that Jesus did build His church. If one admits that Jesus built His church, and He did, then any church that you cannot read about in the New Testament cannot be the church for which Jesus died.

One does not have the scriptural authority to build a church of his own. Yet, there have been men through the ages who have built their own churches. The Lutheran church even bears the name of its founder. Joseph Smith built his church. Mary Baker Eddy founded her church. And on and on we could go. The simple truth is this; any church built by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ is not the church that one reads about in the New Testament. Just suppose that I should say that I am going to build a church. Do you think I have a right to do this? You say, ''No.'' Yet every church in the world that was not built by Jesus Christ is unscriptural and is not, and cannot be, the church for which Jesus Christ died.

It is sad indeed that millions of people never ask themselves such questions as: Is the church to which I belong found in the New Testament? Is the church to which I belong founded by Jesus Christ? Does the church to which I belong wear the name of Christ? If the answers to these questions are no, then let us read what Christ said about these churches that He did not build. ''But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up'' (Matthew 15:13).

II. THE COMPOSITION OF THE CHURCH

The church is composed of those whom the Lord adds to it. "Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). We should notice that this verse does not say that all blessings are in Christ. There are many blessings outside of Christ. Sometimes we hear a Christian say, "Here is a man who is not a Christian, in fact, he has no respect for Christ, His church, or righteousness in general, yet he prospers. He seems to do as well financially and physically as those who are Christians." This Christian misunderstands Ephesians 1:3.

Paul did not say that all blessings are in Christ. He said all spiritual blessings are in Christ. There are certain blessings, or peculiar blessings, found only in Christ. People of the world may and do enjoy physical or material blessings, but only those in Christ enjoy these spiritual blessings.

Hear with what authority the Bible speaks along these lines. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (Second Corinthians 5:17). Almost all religious people teach that one must become a new creature in order to be saved, but the question is, Where does one become a new creature? In Christ or out of Christ? Paul said it is in Christ.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). It is a wonderful thing to know that there is a place where there is no condemnation. This is true of the Christian as long as he walks after the Spirit.

When one is in Christ, he is in the place where Christ will help him in every situation and in every circumstance. When one is in Christ, he is in the place where Christ is his Mediator and High Priest.

Jesus has invited every sinner to come to this place of safety. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Can you conceive of man rejecting Christ in view of His mission? "For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village" (Luke 9:56). The purpose of Jesus coming to this earth was to save man from a devil's hell.

Suppose you should be at sea and a man falls overboard, and you realize that unless he gets help he will drown. You pick up a rope and throw it to him and shout to him, "Take hold of the rope, and I will save you." The man throws the rope back, refusing to take hold of it. You pick the rope up and throw it back to him and plead with him to take hold of the rope, and you will save him. He throws the rope back to you and even ridicules you for throwing the rope to him. What would you think if the man chose to drown rather than taking hold of the rope?

Jesus Christ is throwing the rope to the sinners, saying, "Take hold of the rope of salvation, and I will save you." Thank God that Jesus Christ loved us so much that He gave His life for us, making it possible for us to take hold of the rope of salvation that we might be saved from an eternal hell.

Can you conceive of one rejecting Jesus in view of His authority? Before Moses laid down his scepter, he said, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Among the many things that Peter said in his sermon on Solomon's porch were these words, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:22-23).

The Bible emphasizes the fact that Jesus Christ has power and authority. What He says about something is not about right, it is right. What He says is not about it, that is it. We must accept what He says on any and every subject.

If one wants to know the truth about the church, he should turn to the Bible and see what Jesus said about it. What did Jesus say about the church? "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

If one wants to know the truth about faith, see what Jesus said about it. What did Jesus say about faith? ". . . for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24).

If one wants to know the truth about repentance, see what Jesus said about it because He has all authority, and whatever He says about it is the final word on the subject. "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

If one wants to know the truth about confession, he needs to see what Jesus said on the subject for He is the final authority on every subject. "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

If one wants to know the truth about baptism, he should see what Jesus Christ said about it just before He ascended to Heaven. Let us remember that Jesus Christ has all authority and the final word on every subject. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

When one believes on Jesus Christ and repents of his sins; then confesses the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and is baptized into Christ for the remission of his sins, he becomes a child of God. He is not only a child of God, but he is in Christ where there is no condemnation as long as he walks after the Spirit and not after the flesh. When Paul said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," he was talking about those who had obeyed the gospel and were living the Christian life.

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (First Corinthians 1:1-2).

Paul talks about those who were sanctified in Christ. The word sanctify means to be set apart for a certain purpose. In this case, they were set aside in Christ Jesus to live the Christian life. Yes, one is set aside to live the Christian life, not out of Christ, but in Christ.

What did those Corinthians do to be sanctified in Christ? Paul tells us in First Corinthians 15:1-4, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

We learn from this reading that Paul preached the death, burial and the resurrection of Christ to these people and they obeyed it. How did they obey it?

Let us turn to Romans 6:1-5, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.'' Now notice what Paul says in Romans 6:17-18: ''But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.''

We learn from these verses that those people in Corinth, who were sanctified in Christ Jesus, had obeyed the gospel. What did they do? They obeyed that form of doctrine that every child of God has obeyed. What is a form? A carpenter makes a form and pours cement into the form. When the cement becomes concrete, the carpenter takes away the form.

Just as Jesus died on the cross, the sinner obeys that form and dies to the love and practice of sin. Just as Jesus was buried, the sinner is buried with his Lord in baptism. Just as Christ was raised from the grave, the sinner is raised from the grave of baptism, with all past sins forgiven and to walk in newness of life.

III. THE COST OF THE CHURCH

''Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it'' (Ephesians 5:25). We value things by the price paid for them. Paul tells us that Christ gave His life for the church. How can anyone come to the conclusion that the church is non-essential in view of the fact that Jesus gave His life for it? ''Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood'' (Acts 20:28).

We get the benefit of the money we spend by wearing or using that for which the money was spent. For instance, I get the benefit of the money I spent for this suit by wearing this suit, not some other suit. I get the benefit of the blood of Christ by becoming a member of the church that was purchased with His blood. Every drop of blood that was shed on the cross went into the purchase price of the church. The church is just as essential as the death of Christ.

Let us picture Jesus Christ hanging on the cross. The pain is so excruciating that God sends a blanket of darkness over the earth. In the midst of that darkness, Christ cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Let us ask Christ while He is on the cross, "Christ, why are You dying?" He replies, "I am dying for the church." "Is the church essential?" Christ says, "No." Can you believe it?

Would Jesus suffer, bleed and die for something that is non-essential? Can't you see, my friend, that if Christ died to purchase the church, and man can be saved outside the church, what was the purpose of His death? Notice these expressions, "Christ gave himself for the church" (Ephesians 5:25); "He purchased the church with his blood" (Acts 20:28).

"For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body" (Ephesians 5:23). If it was necessary for Christ to shed His blood that man might be saved, then the church is essential because He purchased the church with His blood. One cannot separate the church from the blood. If the death of Christ was necessary, the church is necessary because He died for the church. Let us never forget that the cost of the church was the blood of the Son of God.

When one speaks lightly of the church, he is speaking lightly of the blood of Christ. When one ridicules the church, he ridicules the death of Christ because Christ died for the church.

IV. THE CREED OF THE CHURCH

The word creed means a brief authoritative formula of religious belief. What is our authoritative formula? The Bible is our creed book. If a group of people should write a creed book that contains more than the Bible, it contains too much. If it does not contain as much as the Bible, it does not contain enough. If it contains just exactly what the Bible contains, then there is no need for a creed book written by man.

It is not an uncommon thing for a group of religious people to meet and change their creed book. What a group of people may say about a certain doctrine being true this year, the very next year another group may meet and put in their creed, "We no longer believe what was in the creed book, but this is what we believe now."

God said to His people many years ago, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32). "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:6).

Among the last words that John spoke, and just before he laid down the pen of inspiration, he said, "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-19).

Our plea to all people is this; Let us take the Bible, and only the Bible, as our rule of faith and practice. Yes, we should speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.

V. THE COMMISSION OF THE CHURCH

When Jesus gave the commission to His disciples, He said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:16).

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:13-15).

When Paul wrote these words, the ancient Roman virtues, the admirable simplicity and the unconquerable courage of old Rome had died away; so had the old religion. The decay and corruption of it were accelerated by the engrafting of new and dark superstitions. The change of social life was startling. Vice was deified. The pagan world knew not God. But when the gospel reached them, it had a great influence upon their lives. The gospel modified private, individual, social, and state life.

We must realize that it is the *Gospel*, I repeat the *Gospel*. People are sick and tired of hearing ministers quote from twentieth century philosophers instead of the apostles. People, those who love the truth, are sick and tired of hearing ministers quoting from newspapers and magazines instead of quoting from the New Testament. Unless we carry the same gospel message to the people that Christ and His apostles carried to them during the first century, then all our efforts are vain. It should disturb one who loves the truth to hear preachers fill their sermons with quotations from modern day religious teachers and seldom quote from Jesus, Paul, Peter or James.

The early church realized the importance of proclaiming the gospel. Obedient to the imperial summons of the Master to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, the apostles and their co-laboring saints of the cross, embarked on their sublime and hazardous journey, beginning at Jerusalem. They went forth to regions and preached Jesus and the resurrection. In a few years after they started, the gospel had sounded its report all over the Roman Empire, even in the ranks of Caesar's household.

The gospel that was proclaimed by the First Century preachers was so simple that a child could understand it. Every young preacher should read the *Hardeman Tabernacle Sermons*. They are scriptural, powerful, and yet very simple.

Many churches are very indifferent concerning the preaching of the gospel. A number of churches are like the one in Laodicea. This church was not disturbed by persecutions. The service could be maintained without strain. No one seemed to be of a contentious disposition to disturb the peace. They had drifted into an easy-going way and satisfied themselves with keeping things up to a fair average. We must remember that our opinion of ourselves and Christ's opinion of us may be very different.

Laodicea was lukewarm about everything. It was dying, as churches can die, of moderation and respectability. It might, in its apparently sound and safe prosperity, be the envy of other churches. Its very evenness, its persistently keeping at a dead level, was an offense to Jesus Christ. No one in the church brought disgrace upon the Christian name. The church did not make the holy and inspiring witness of consistency in keeping at a high level of Christian attainment and service. It was simply at ease, indifferent, content to go on, aiming at nothing and doing nothing.

The lukewarm are neither earnest for God, nor utterly indifferent to religion. They are perhaps best described as those who take an interest in religion, but whose worship of their idol of good taste, or good form, leads them to regard enthusiasm as ill-bred and disturbing; and who never put themselves to any inconvenience, braved any reproach, or abandoned any comfort for Christ's sake; but hoped to keep well with the world, while they flattered themselves that they stood well with God. Carlyle called this, "The hypocrisy that does not know itself to be hypocritical."

The members of the church at Laodicea were not cold, but they were not hot. They were not infidels, but they were not earnest believers. They did not oppose the gospel, neither did they defend it. They were not working mischief, neither were they doing any great good. They were not disreputable in moral character, neither were they distinguised for holiness. They were prudent and avoided fanaticism; respectable and averse to excitement.

When churches drift into indifference in preaching the gospel to a lost world, they do much harm to the church. Five thousand lukewarm members are five thousand impediments, but a dozen earnest people, who love the lost, will bring about a great growth in the Lord's church.

"Before she travailed, she brought forth: before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children" (Isaiah 66:7-8).

11

Only a Christian

Every person should ask himself the question, "Is the name I am wearing, or the church to which I belong, found in the Bible?" Every person should want to be a Christian and only a Christian. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" (Ephesians 3:14-15).

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians about A.D. 64, the whole family had been named. Since that name has been given, we want to find that name; we want to see to whom the name was given; we want to see by whose authority the name was given.

Listen to Paul as he speaks to the Gentiles in Ephesians 2:11-22, "Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenents of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Paul is reminding the Gentiles, who are now Christians, that they were once aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, but that Christ had broken down the middle wall of partition, having abolished the law of commandments, to make of the two, one new man, and reconciled both to God in one body: and that they were no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints. He reminds them that it is by the favor or grace of God that these Gentiles are permitted to be saved through faith and obedience without the law of Moses, which had once been imposed on the Jews, but now had been abolished.

Having seen the whole family, Jews and Gentiles, united in one body, and built upon the one foundation, and the Gentiles, fellow heirs, and of the same body, according to the eternal purpose, or plan of the ages, the apostle breaks forth in the language of the text; "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

THIS NEW NAME IS GIVEN IN PROPHECY

Let us see what we learn about this new name. (1) Isaiah 65:15, "And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name." (2) Isaiah 62:2, "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." (3) Isaiah 60:3, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising."

Here are three prophecies uttered about seven hundred years before the birth of Christ. In one it is affirmed that God will call His people by another name; in the next, that when the Gentiles and kings see the righteousness of which Isaiah spoke, they shall be called by a new name; and third, that the Gentiles and kings shall come to the light. The new name would be one given by the mouth of the Lord. In the year sixty when James wrote his epistle, they were called by a worthy or honorable name: for he says, "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" (James 2:7).

About the year A.D. 96, this expression was used, "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (Revelation 2:3). Here several years after the disciples were called Christians at Antioch, we find Christ Himself, the Head of the church, commending the churches for still holding fast His name, thus further indicating that they were named after Christ Jesus, the One who was dead and alive again, the Prince of Peace, and the Priest of the most high God. Jesus Christ who went with the pale monarch of death into the darkness of the grave to make it possible for man to be saved. It was an honorable name which God's people were wearing.

THE NAME CHRISTIAN IS FOUND THREE TIMES IN THE BIBLE

There were many great men in the Old Testament, but not one of them was ever called a Christian.

Noah was a great man of God, one who preached for many years and was a righteous man, but he was never called a Christian.

Moses was a great man and performed many great deeds. He led the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, but Moses was never called a Christian.

Abraham was a great man of God. His faith was tried in so many ways. When he was about seventy-five years old, God promised him a son by his legal wife, Sarah. In the mean-time, God called upon Abraham to leave his native land and go into a country that he would show him. This great man of God took with him his immediate family, his nephew Lot, and his father, and traveled for about six hundred miles up the Euphrates valley and came to Haran. It was here that God renewed the promise to Abraham.

When Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah was ninety, God fulfilled His promise, and Abraham became the father of his first son by his legal wife, Sarah. When this son grew to young manhood, God called upon Abraham to offer his son upon the altar. This great man of God went so far as to bind his son upon the altar and was going to take his life, but God stayed his hand. But the great man Abraham was never called a Christian.

There were many great men in the old Testament who did many wonderful and great deeds, but no one in the Old Testament was ever called a Christian. From the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Malachi no one was ever called a Christian.

Now we come to the New Testament and read through the book of Matthew and observe all the great works done by Christ and His apostles, but we do not find the word Christian in the book of Matthew.

We begin with the first chapter of Mark and continue to read through the book of Luke and the book of John, but we do not find the new name that Isaiah said God would give to His people.

We read about the establishment of the church in Acts the second chapter, but these people who obeyed the gospel on this day were not called Christians at this time. We learn from Acts the tenth chapter that Cornelius (a Gentile) and his household obeyed the gospel, and after this took place, then the disciples were called by the name that Isaiah said would be given to God's people after the Gentiles had seen the righteousness of God. Now let us notice the name given to God's people.

"And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch'' (Acts 11:26).

''Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian'' (Acts 26:28).

''But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf'' (First Peter 4:15-16).

THE NAME CHRISTIAN WAS RECOGNIZED BY THE ROMAN COURT

The Roman court at Caesarea knew the name by which the disciples of Christ were called at a period of about nineteen years from the time they received the name. For Paul in his address before King Agrippa was insisting that the King believe the prophets. ''Then Agrippa said unto Paul: almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.''

Peter, writing to the elect, says: ''If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.'' Then the reproach for the name of Christ is explained in the sixteenth verse as suffering as a Christian. Over twenty years they had now been known to the outside world by the name Christian, and had been persecuted in this name, brought before tribunals in this name, and glorified God in this name by suffering as a Christian.

When Peter explained to the Jews why he had preached to the Gentiles, they then said, ''Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life'' (Acts 11:18).

Now the family has received the long-looked-for name, and the name is Christian and recorded in the Bible. It is given at the right time when the Gentiles had come in, and under the superintendence of Paul, an apostle of Christ, and Barnabas, an apostle of the church, so that the head and the body, the bridegroom and the bride, are mutually represented at the naming of the family. From that day until this one, the name

Christian is the name that God's people have worn, and by Christ they are properly called.

THE NAME CHRISTIAN IS A NAME OF DISTINCTION

The name Christian is a name of distinction, intended to distinguish those who wear it from all other people. This is the use people make of names. We use proper names for the purpose of distinquishing one person or thing from another person or thing. Doubtless this is the reason why the Lord, in the beginning, permitted our father Adam to give names to all the cattle, fowls of the air, and beasts of the field. This was done so that in all coming time every kind of living creature might be distinguished by name. This name Christian distinguishes us from people of the world.

The name Christian implies that we are to be Christ-like in our love. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

We all talk about love, but the world wants to see love in action. The example of the Samaritan is an example of love in action. Jesus was teaching, on one occasion, when a lawyer asked Him a question about what he could do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him, "What is written in the law?" (Luke 10:26). The lawyer knew, for he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27). Jesus said to him, "This do, and thou shalt live. But he willing to justify himself . . ." (Luke 10:28-29). So many times this is man's trouble today, he wants to justify himself.

At this point Jesus told the parable of the Samaritan. He said a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. He told how a priest came down that way, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. Then He told how a Levite came where he was, looked on him and passed by on the other side. No doubt, the priest and Levite justified themselves by passing by on the other side. They could have said, "We have been away from home thirty days, and we are homesick." They could have said, "We are not doctors, or the sight of blood makes us sick." There were many excuses they could have offered for not lending a helping hand. No doubt, the priest had been teaching the people how to act in a situation like this one.

A Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, notice what he did: (1) He had compassion on him; (2) he bound up his wounds; (3) he set him on his beast and brought him to an inn; (4) he paid for his room; (5) and he stayed with him during the night waiting on him. Jesus then said unto the lawyer, "Which now of these three thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:36-37).

The Bible does not call this man the good Samaritan, but he is called the good Samaritan by all who study the Bible. Why? His love was put into action.

The world today wants to see the love in action. Let me give you an example of love in action. A few months ago there was a young man who was killed by a hit-and-run driver. It was a cold December night, and this young man was hit by this driver about 6:00 p.m. He was not found until the next morning.

Sister Avenger is a member of the Bellingrath Road church and lives in the community where this young boy's people live. Sister Avenger visited the family and learned that they were very poor, and not even able financially to bury their son.

Sister Avenger then went to a store and told the manager the circumstances, and the man gave her a pair of trousers. She went to another store, and they gave her a nice coat. She then went to the funeral home and told the owner the circumstances, and he gave a nice casket. The funeral director asked this lady, "Are you a relative of these people?" She said, "No, I am just trying to do my duty as a Christian." The owner of the funeral home was so impressed that he gave this lady one hundred and fifteen dollars that he had in his wallet, and said, "I want you to take this, for I want to have a part in this good work you are doing." He said to her, "This is one of the most beautiful acts of Christianity I have ever seen." This was love in action, and this is what the world wants to see.

The Name Christian Implies Ownership

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (First Corinthians 6:19-20).

The Christian, who has the proper understanding of the Bible and of his relationship to Christ, thinks of himself as being married to Christ.

"Know ye not, brethren (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:1-4).

We should think of ourselves as belonging to Christ because we are married to Him. Because we are married to Christ and belong to Him, we should honor Him, and reverence Him, and obey Him.

THE NAME CHRISTIAN IS A UNIVERSAL NAME

There were many religious parties when Christ came into the world, and each party had its respective religious cognomen. But when people obeyed the gospel, they left their former name and were known by the name Christian. This is that new name Isaiah said that God would give to His people.

No one has the right to wear this name until he has obeyed the gospel. "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9).

For one to become a Christian he must believe on Jesus Christ. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). One must also repent of his sins. "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Those things just mentioned are important and must be done by the alien sinner, but these alone will not make one a Christian. The Bible teaches that after an individual has believed on Christ, repented of his sins, confessed his faith in Christ, he must be baptized (Mark 16:16).

Baptism is not some kind of a church ordinance, but it is a plain positive command of the Lord telling the alien sinner what to do to have his sins forgiven. Read the following verses carefully.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned'' (Mark 16:15-16).

‘‘Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost'' (Acts 2:38).

‘‘For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ'' (Galatians 3:27).

No one has the right to call himself a child of God, nor does he have a Bible right to wear the name Christian until he has obeyed these commands of the Lord. ‘‘And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?'' (Luke 6:46).

When a Jew obeyed the gospel, he left his former name on the other side of the grave of baptism. When a Gentile obeyed the gospel, he, too, was known as a Christian. When people today obey the gospel, they are Christians.

THE NAME CHRISTIAN IS A PATRONYMIC NAME

A patronymic name is a name of men or women, derived from that of their parents, or ancestors. Pennsylvania is a patronymic name, and refers to William Penn for whom the state was named. Washington, when applied to the capital of the United States, is a patronymic name referring to the father of our Country.

It is said by some who wish to justify themselves in wearing unscriptural names, that the name Christian was given to the disciples of Christ by their enemies, as a name of reproach. If this name was given by the enemy, why did Peter say, ‘‘If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name.''

When King Agrippa said to Paul, ‘‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,'' would the apostle have given countenance to that name, as he did, had he known that it originated in the dark, black hearts of the children of the wicked one? But instead, he acknowledged the name Christian by saying, "Would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Acts 26:29).

My brethren, if this name is to distinguish the people of God from all other people; if this name is intended to point out those who wear it as the Lord's property; if it is a universal name for God's people; if it is a patronymic name referring to Christ, the Founder of the church; if the name Christian was given by divine authority, then I say, we ought to give serious thoughts and consideration to the tremendous responsibilities resting upon those of us who wear the name Christian.

12

God Desires Unity

The Bible places great emphasis upon unity. That you may have a greater appreciation for unity, let us observe with what authority the Bible speaks on this subject. God has but one people on earth and has given to them one book, and therein exhorts and commands them to be one family.

Psalm 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Proverbs 6:16-19, “These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”

Romans 14:19, “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”

Romans 12:16, “Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.”

First Peter 3:8, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous."

Matthew 12:25, ". . . Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation."

Many other scriptures could be given, but these are sufficient to show that the Bible places great emphasis upon unity. The unity of which the New Testament speaks is unity in Christ and unity among those who have obeyed the gospel. There can be no unity with those who have never obeyed the gospel.

Observe the prayer that our Lord prayed the night before His crucifixion: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:20-23).

Notice how Christ differentiated between His disciples and the world. Jesus said in verse sixteen, "They are not of the world as I am not of the world." The unity for which Christ prayed was to be the result of being united with Himself and the Father. He was in the Father and the Father in Him, so that They were One. Our Lord prayed that we might be one in Them.

We will have this unity in Christ when we preach, teach, and practice what the Bible teaches. We must place the Bible above our opinions. We must change man to fit the Bible and not change the Bible to fit man. The great sin in the religious world is trying to change the Bible to fit man, and many times we see this very thing attempted by some in the church. When one tries to bind his opinion on others, he is trying to change the Bible to fit man. We must realize that there are thousands of opinions, but only one faith.

Alexander Campbell said, "We were not indeed at first apprized of the havoc which our principles would make of our opinions. We soon, however, found our principles and opinions at war on some points, and the question immediately arose whether we shall sacrifice our principles to our opinions or our opinions to our principles. We need not say that we were compelled to do the latter; judging that our principles were better than our opinions."

Raccoon John Smith said, "We should always allow to others that which we claim for ourselves, the right of private judgment. If either Christians or Reformers have erroneous opinions, they can never injure anyone, provided we all have prudence enough to keep them to ourselves."

With some there is no room for differences of opinions. Unless we are willing to sacrifice personal opinions, how can we claim to be the children of God. No, we can never sacrifice truth, but we can and should be willing to sacrifice personal opinions for the sake of unity. Much of the division in the body of Christ is over peripheral matters.

Division is a great hindrance to the cause of Christ. Division wastes and dissipates energies that we should be using in evangelistic work. If we could convert the energies that we exert in fussing with one another into evangelistic power, we could evangelize the world in our lifetime. Many seem not to be concerned about Mark 16:15.

Division is bad in the community, the home, and even worse in the body of Christ. Division leads to all kinds of sin. "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Galatians 5:15). "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). Notice the expressions, "devour one another" and "confusion and every evil work." We see these very things taking place in the body of Christ today.

What would you think if soldiers in battle should begin shooting their own men? It is sad indeed that in the army of the Lord, we, many times, shoot our own soldiers. It might be that a great persecution would unite us. No, I do not want a persecution. But suppose the government should start persecuting Christians, throwing them into camps and jails. I have an idea that we would be united as those early Christians were in the first century when they were being persecuted.

Edward Gibbons said, "That, even admitting, without hesitation or inquiry, all that history has recorded, or devotion has feigned, on the subject of martyrdoms, it must be acknowledged that the Christians, in the course of their intestine dissentions, have inflicted greater severities on each other than they had experienced from the zeal of infidels."

We are talking about unity, not union. We have union in the religious world, but Christ prayed for unity. When the leaders of the world come to the United Nations to discuss their problems, this is a union meeting, but a long way from a unity meeting. The late Marshall Keeble gave this illustration: "If you could take two cats, tie their tails together, throw them over a clothesline, you would have a union meeting, but not a unity meeting."

The ecumenical movement was aimed at unity in diversity. Someone has said that unity in diversity is an amalgamated conglomeration of toleration of religious error. Unity in diversity is the cry of the ecumenical movement, but unity in Christ is the teaching of the New Testament. Unity in Christ and unity in diversity are two different things. There is as much difference in the two as there is in speculation and revelation, or groping and guidance, or light and darkness.

The word unity means to bring together, a state or condition of being one; singleness; oneness in sentiment; something which is complete within itself.

There may be diversity of opinions, but there must be unity in matters of faith. There must be unity in worship because there is one God. There must be unity in authority because there is one Lord. There must be unity in message because there is one faith. There must be unity in organization because there is one body. There must be unity in practice because there is one baptism. There must be unity in life because there is one spirit. There must be unity in desire because there is one hope.

We can learn a great lesson from studying First Corinthians. Paul knew about their troubles and divisions, and he said, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (First Corinthians 1:10).

Paul encourages them to be united in message, that is, speak the same thing. We should speak the same thing because there is only one source of Christianity. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (Second Timothy 3:16-17).

There is only one gospel for the whole world, and if all preachers preached this one gospel, then there would be unity in our message. There can never be unity in the teachings of the doctrines and commandments of men, but by preaching only the one gospel that is for every creature.

There is unity in practice. "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). Notice Paul wanted to hear that they were standing fast in one spirit and one mind; that they were striving together. Many times we strive against each other.

I have seen large and powerful horses trying to pull a wagon that was loaded with wood. One would jump forward and the other one pull back; both horses would work themselves into a lather, but could not move the wagon. Then there would be a small pair of mules with a heavy load to pull. The owner would give the command to go, and they would pull together and move the heavy load. It is good to strive as long as we are striving together. We should strive together to promote all good works. If we could learn this great and important lesson, we could be united in practice.

We should be united in attitude. Every false doctrine and every apostasy had its beginning with an attitude. "Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits" (Isaiah 30:10). "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (Second Timothy 4:1-4).

The first step in departing from the truth is to reject sound gospel preaching. The second step is to segregate the teachers. If one does not fit into their mold, then they don't use him. These people are very careful in selecting teachers, who will teach, not necessarily the truth, but what they want to hear. The third step is that they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned unto fables. It started with an attitude. There are some attitudes being manifested in the church, which, if they continue, will destroy the soundness of the Lord's church.

Some have the attitude that one should not preach a negative gospel. We must remember that eight of the Ten Commandments are negative. I have never thought that this meant that eighty percent of our preaching is to be negative. The truth is that one cannot preach the whole gospel without preaching a negative gospel as well as a positive gospel.

The battery in an automobile has a negative post and a positive post. If you disconnect the positive post, the car will not start. If you disconnect the negative post, the car will not start. The electricity that comes into the house has a positive wire and a negative wire. For one to talk about preaching the whole counsel of God and to preach only a positive doctrine makes about as much sense as a man trying to wire a house and using only a positive wire. There are times when one needs to be very positive in his preaching, but there are other times when a preacher is to reprove and rebuke, and that is negative preaching. Shepherds love their sheep, but they hate wolves. Farmers love corn, but hate weeds. Faithful preachers love truth, but hate error and false doctrine.

Then there is the attitude of telling human interest stories. A good illustration is powerful in a sermon, but when one builds his lesson on human interest stories instead of the Bible, it will destroy the spiritual life of those who listen to these stories week after week. Many elders do not know the difference in sound Bible teaching and in human interest stories. I heard of one elder who objected to their new preacher because he used too much Bible in his preaching. What is a man supposed to use in his preaching? The elder said the other preacher entertained us, but this man preaches to us. He preferred entertainment to preaching of the gospel. Which do you prefer? But many elders get the office through politics and would not know sound Bible preaching from facts taken from the *Farmer's Almanac*. Thank God we have many good, sound, informed elders, but oh, I fear we have many who just do not know what sound Bible preaching is when they hear it. This is one of the great dangers facing the church of tomorrow.

Apostasy is such a slow moving thing, it is like the dreaded cancer that can almost kill us before we are aware of its presence. We must remember that the church is always just one generation away from a complete apostasy.

It has always been difficult to keep unity in the church. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus and exhorted them to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. In chapter four he gave four prerequisites to unity: (1) with all lowliness; (2) meekness; (3) longsuffering; (4) forbearing one another in love. Let us look at these:

Lowliness: state or quality of being lowly.
Meekness: to be submissive; humble; mild.

Longsuffering: patiently enduring.

Forbearing: to abstain from; to avoid; to bear with; to control one's feelings.

It is an easy thing to talk about unity without making these prerequisites a part of our lives. Ephesians 4:2 is the preamble to unity. After Paul talked about the qualifications that one must have to be an asset to unity, he said, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Unity does not just happen. If there is unity in the community, someone put forth a special effort to bring it about. The word ENDEAVOR means to exert all strength for accomplishment of an object, to strive, to struggle. When there is unity in the home, someone has to exert all strength for it to exist.

The only way we can ever have unity in the Lord's church is for all of us to strive together, struggle together, and exert all our strength to be of one mind. When we follow the instruction of the apostle Paul, the unity for which our Lord so fervently prayed the night before His crucifixion will be realized. As a Christian one should never do or say anything that would even tend to destroy the unity in the body of Christ for which our Lord prayed.

We must stand firm for the truth, but let us be sure that it is God's truth that we are contending for and not some opinion or hobby that we have embraced. I must realize that it is wrong for me to try to bind my opinions on others. I can only bind where God has bound. In the realm of opinion there must be liberty.

Every member of the Lord's church should study Joshua the twenty-second chapter. A great lesson can be learned from this chapter.

After the battles had been fought in Canaan, war had ceased and victory won, Joshua made a speech to the Reubenites, Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. He said to them, "You have obeyed the voice of Moses in all that he commanded you. All that I have commanded, you have obeyed. You can now go back to the land of your possession which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of Jordan."

Joshua charged them to remember the commandment of Moses, to serve God, to love God, and walk in His ways. Joshua told them to take with them their cattle, silver, gold, and all that belonged to them. This was a beautiful speech. There was perfect unity and understanding among them.

When the tribe of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, they came to Jordan. When they came to the borders of Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, they built an altar. It was a great altar to behold.

When the children of Israel heard that the altar had been built, they wondered why this was done. Someone, no doubt, surmised that they were going to offer sacrifices to some idol. This disturbed the children of Israel very much. Every one is talking about this great sin that Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh had committed. They became so worked up that the children of Israel wanted to declare war on them. The children of Israel had a very intelligent person among them. He said, no doubt, "Don't you think we ought to go and talk to them before we go and kill all of them?" I am convinced if some of my brethren had been living back there, they would have said, "Ask no questions, go kill them." When someone writes an article that is filled with false information and acrimony, he is a troublemaker, sower of discord, and is the man who is causing trouble in the body of Christ.

The children of Israel sent Phinehas and other messengers to talk to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Phinehas made a great speech, but it was based on false information. Phinehas began his speech by telling them that they had committed a great sin in turning away from God and building this altar. He said to them, "Don't you remember the sin of Peor, from which we are not cleansed this day. Why will you turn away from following the Lord? Why will you rebel against the Lord? Why didn't you go over Jordan without building an altar beside the altar of the Lord our God? Don't you remember the sin of Achan, how God punished all of Israel for his sin?" That was a great speech, but it was based on false information.

Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh said, "If we be in rebellion to the Lord, we should be punished. We did not build this altar to turn away from the Lord; or to offer burnt offerings, or make offerings thereon. We built this altar because we were afraid that the time would come when your children would say to our children, what have you to do with the Lord God of Israel? The Lord has made Jordan a border between us. Your children would make our children cease fearing the Lord. We built this altar so your children could not say to our children, you have no part in the Lord. God forbid that we should rebel against the Lord, and turn this day from following Him."

When Phinehas and those with him heard the truth, they were pleased. They returned to tell the children of Israel that the whole thing was based upon a false report. I would rather think that the one who started this false report was one who had set himself up as the watchdog of orthodoxy. When the children of Israel heard the truth, they were pleased, and there was unity.

Why did all this trouble come about? In the first place they did not trust each other. It is sad indeed when we, as brethren in Christ, lose all confidence in each other. I am convinced my brethren are the best people in the world. They want to do right. They want to serve God. There is something definitely wrong with a man's character when he doubts everybody else in the church. We need to have more confidence and trust in each other so that unity may exist among us.

In the second place they put the very worst interpretation upon what they heard. What if every member of the body of Christ put the worst interpretation upon everything he hears about us? We do not want people to treat us that way. We say this is being unfair. Then we should not put the worst interpretation upon what we hear. "I heard" and "they say" have caused more heartaches and troubles than anything else in the body of Christ. Peter said that love covers a multitude of sins. When we love people we do not put the worst interpretation upon what they do.

In the third place they jumped to a false conclusion. They just surmised that Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh were going to offer sacrifices to some idol. They were wrong just as we are in most instances when we jump to a conclusion.

A few years ago when Wednesday night fell on the last day of the year, the young people in a certain congregation decided to have a social after Bible study, and play their banjos and fiddles until after midnight. They were going to play the old year out and the new year in. The small congregation got permission to use the community center for their social. The weather was bad, so they decided to have their Bible study and their social at the community center. They first had their Bible study for one hour and then dismissed the congregation. About one hour later the ladies had the food ready and they ate. About ten o'clock the boys started playing their instruments and played until after midnight. A certain brother heard about this and wrote in his paper that this church had introduced mechanical instruments of music into the worship. Such false reporting sows discord in the body of Christ.

We learn from this twenty-second chapter of Joshua that unity is destroyed when there is a lack of trust, when we put the worst interpretation upon things we hear, and when we jump to conclusions.

When we truly love God; when we truly respect the revelation given by the Holy Spirit, when we become truly concerned about lost people; when we truly love each other; and when we truly put the church first in our lives, we will desire unity as our Lord desires unity. When this happens, we will be a united people.

Let all of us resolve to promote and practice those things that will bring about unity. When we teach unity and practice division, Jude would say of us, "These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: Clouds that are without water, carried about of winds;

trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots."

When we teach unity and practice division, we are like the priest of whom Micah spoke, "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us."

Teaching unity and practicing division is like the Pharisees of whom Christ spoke when He said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law; judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

When we teach unity and practice division, we are like Judas who would betray one to death with a kiss.

When we teach unity and practice division, we are like Absalom who would do one obeisance, and at the same time steal his heart from God.

When we teach unity and practice division, we are like left-handed Ehud who would extend his right hand in fellowship and with his left hand pull his dagger from his bosom, and plunge it through the stomach.

The basis for unity is the Bible. We should pray for unity as did our Lord. We must realize that our going to heaven depends upon promoting unity. Let us never forget that Jesus Christ said, "Blessed are the *peacemakers;* for they shall be called the children of God." Let us also remember that all of our problems must be settled in the context of love.

13

Doing All Things Without Partiality

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he gave him this advice; "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (First Timothy 5:21).

The word prejudice is not found in the King James version of the Bible, but the principle of prejudice is found throughout the Bible. The word prejudice means a prejudgment; rendering a decision without knowing all the facts in the case; making up one's mind with only partial information. When an individual does this, he is not being governed by reason, knowledge, or facts. We should be guided by Bible truths and not prejudice.

It is unfortunate that most people are what they are religiously, not because of a deep investigation of the Word of God, but because of tradition and prejudice. This is true in all religious bodies.

Will Rogers said, "We are all ignorant; we are just ignorant about different things." And, no doubt, all of us are prejudice; we are just prejudice about different things. I would guess that every person present is prejudice to some degree, but no one should be so prejudice that he refuses to admit the truth when shown what the truth is.

POLITICAL PREJUDICE

We all know that there is much prejudice in the political world. We hear people talk like this; "My father was a Democrat; my grandfather was a Democrat; therefore, I am a Democrat." He means by this that no one can teach him anything. My friend, this is prejudice.

Someone else will say, "My father was a Republican; my grandfather and great grandfather were Republicians, and for this reason, I vote the Republican ticket." If this person were shown ten thousand good reasons why he should change his vote, he would refuse to do so.

There are many things wrong with this country, but there is no doubt in my mind that one reason this country is in trouble in so many ways is because millions of people cast their votes, not because of what they think is best for the country, but their votes are cast on dark, blind prejudice.

Because of prejudice, people, who are running for office, are often heard to say derogatory things about their political opponents to poison the minds of the people. Have you ever wondered why these men do this? I can tell you why. If I can tell you something about a person to poison your mind against him, then you will not listen to him, because such information will, in most instances, close the minds of the people. Prejudice is a powerful weapon and also a dangerous weapon.

Prejudice is so powerful that all nations use it. During World War II, there was a woman in Germany who was referred to as Axis Sally. Her mission was to broadcast to the Americans and feed them propaganda to poison their minds against the American government. She would broadcast to the American boys that their wives, back home, were untrue to them, and that the American people did not appreciate what they were doing. She did this day after day, and week after week, in fact, all during the war for the purpose of trying to prejudice the minds of the boys against their government.

SOCIAL PREJUDICE

There is much prejudice in the social and racial world. Sometimes one will say that a certain person came from the wrong side of the railroad track. He means by this that the person has one strike against him, or maybe two strikes against him. Why? Because of his community, his environment, or his surroundings, people are prejudical toward that particular class of people.

ABSALOM AND PREJUDICE

There is, no doubt, more religious prejudice in the world than there are political, social, and racial prejudice combined. There are many examples in the Bible of those who were religiously prejudicial. Let us notice some of these.

The fifteenth chapter of Second Samuel tells of King David as he reigned over God's people. Among David's children, he had one by the name of Absalom. This son Absalom wanted to reign over God's people. He wanted to sit on the throne. He was not in line for this position, but he still had this strong desire. He wanted to become king. Absalom was a shrewd and very brilliant young man. He knew that if he could prejudice the minds of the people against his father, they would not listen to him. They would not take his father's advice, and if he could poison their minds, they would rise up in rebellion against his father, and then he could become their king.

Absalom would go to the marketplace to greet the people. I can imagine the conversation going something like this; "You know King David is taxing us to death. It seems that just about everything we make goes for taxes. David, my father, has not been running the affairs of the government very well."

Absalom, no doubt, would say to the people, "Oh, if I were your judge, but of course I am not, but if I were your king, there would be no trouble in Israel. We would live in a land where peace and harmony existed. It would be a kingdom where everybody would always get justice, and all the people would be happy."

Absalom would take the people in his arms, embrace them, and kiss them. The Bible says, "And Absalom stole the hearts of all Israel." And he continued to do this until he was able to raise an army and declare war on his own father. It was through prejudice that Absalom was able to raise an army to try to kill David.

But the divine providence of God saw to it that David was protected. Absalom was to never sit on the throne. He was killed while riding his beast in the woods of Ephram. God has given us this example that we might see that prejudice is a terrible thing.

When David was told that Absalom had been killed, David wept for his son. "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my Son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (Second Samuel 18:33).

DEMETRIUS AND PREJUDICE

Acts the nineteenth chapter is another classic example of someone trying to prejudice the minds of the people. Paul was conducting a great gospel meeting in the city of Ephesus. He preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, and many were obeying it. I know that the people truly repented for we are told, "Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:19-20).

The people were happy. They had repented and obeyed the gospel. The people, no doubt, were saying, "We have never heard such great preaching." The apostle Paul was preaching the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul told those people that those false gods they were worshipping could not save them. Paul told them about the true God, and how they should worship Him. When the honest and sincere people heard these truths, they obeyed the gospel.

These people turned from those idols to the true God. Then they burned those books they had been reading because they had truly repented. One would think that when the apostle Paul came to town preaching in a revival that all the people would be thrilled. But let us see what the Bible says. In verse twenty-four of this same chapter it says, "A certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen." Now notice what he did. He called together the workmen of like occupation, and said, "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth."

Demetrius, at this point, has not said anything to prejudice the minds of the people. He had called the people together and said, "You men know that we have our living by making these little gods."

Then he said, "Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth" (Acts 19:26-27).

Now listen to this. "Now when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts 19:28).

Just a little while before, they were talking about Paul being a great preacher. He was a great man of God, and he was preaching the truth. There was a man in town by the name of Demetrius, who tried and did prejudice the minds of many against Paul. Well, one might say, "Did not the apostle Paul say there were no gods made with hands?" Yes, but Demetrius poisoned the minds of the people by telling them just part of the truth. A person, who wants to poison the minds of the people, will always tell enough truth to get the confidence of the people. I realize that it would be a strange thing for an individual to start telling a person things the person to whom he is talking knows them to be untrue. He could not poison his mind. He must first get the person's confidence, and that is what Demetrius did with some of the people.

Demetrius called the men together and said, "You men realize that by this craft we have our wealth. This man, Paul, has come to town and is teaching that there are no gods made with hands."

If Demetrius had told the whole truth, he would have talked after this order: "Paul says that this business in which we are engaged is not right, and that these little gods that we are making will not save anyone. Instead of putting our faith in these gods that we are making, we should put our faith in the God who created the heavens and the earth. Paul is calling upon us to turn away from these gods that we are making, and believe in the God in whom we live and have our very being."

Did you ever hear a person talk like this: "That man has come to town, and he just destroys and tears down." My friends, altars to false gods must be torn down through our preaching. One must preach the truth, and that is what Paul was doing. A gospel preacher must never be ugly, unkind, or sarcastic, but he must always preach the truth, and when preaching the whole truth, error is always condemned. Paul always preached to people what they needed to hear, instead of telling them what they wanted to hear.

When the people heard what Demetrius had to say, they began shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" No, they said he is not going to destroy our gods. Some of the people thought Paul had gone into the theater. The mob got so worked up and so disturbed that they rushed into the theater thinking Paul was in there. "Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused and the greater part knew not wherefore they had come together." If someone had walked into the theater and tapped one of those men on the shoulder and said, "Sir, what are you doing?" Many of them would not have known what he had done or said. They were only manifesting a mob spirit.

These people were controlled by prejudice and not by reasoning. Prejudice, my friends, is a terrible thing. It is sad to know that there are many who are very prejudicial against the truth. The preceding example is recorded in the Bible that all of us may read it and profit by it.

THE HIGH PRIEST AND PREJUDICE

We are told in Acts the third chapter that Peter and John went to the gate that is called Beautiful. It was here that they healed a man who had been lame from his mother's womb. This healed man was so happy that he went through the temple, and he leaped for joy. The people saw this man, who was lame from his mother's womb, and now the man had been healed.

When the religious leaders heard and saw what had been done, they called Peter and John to question them. Those religious leaders asked, "By what power and in whose name have you done this?" They did not deny the man had been healed.

I do not know what those religious leaders thought Peter and John would say. We must remember Peter was a brave and courageous man. In my mind I can see these religious leaders sitting there with their robes on and their beards down to their chest. They were sitting there in all their splendor, and those gospel preachers sitting before them to answer their questions.

The chief spokesman says, "You men tell us in whose name and by whose authority you healed this man." I can hear Peter say to them, "Do you men remember the man that you murdered a few days ago? Do you remember the One who taught those great truths that you rejected? It was in His name that we made this man whole, in the name of the One whom you killed."

Now let me tell you what the court decided. "But when they commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves." This was some conference those men were having. They knew that Peter and John were preaching the truth. They knew the man had been healed. This is the decision those religious leaders made. "That it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them." What was the threat? That it spread no further among the people. They did not want the truth made known to the people. "And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18).

"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4:19). Peter and John were great gospel preachers and would preach only what they had seen and heard of God.

THE COURT AND PREJUDICE

There is much prejudice in this age in all walks of life. Have you ever been to court and heard the lawyers question the prospective jurors? It goes like this; "Do you know anything about this case?" And if you say, yes, you are not permitted to sit on the case because the judge and the lawyer know that you cannot render a fair decision. The reason many do not accept the truth when they hear it is because they have already made up their minds. For one to understand the simple truths of God, he must have a sincere desire to know and understand the truth.

Prejudice will cause people to kill. Let us observe what prejudice caused people to do to Stephen. "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord" (Acts 7:54-57).

THE REMEDY FOR PREJUDICE

The remedy for prejudice is found in John the first chapter. Philip said to Nathaniel, "Come and see." "The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). We should study the Bible with an open mind.

EXAMPLES OF PREJUDICE TODAY

How many times have you heard someone say, "You think no one is going to heaven except you and your little group." I have never made a statement like that in my life. I have never heard any other gospel preacher make a statement like that. Some people make remarks like that to prejudice the minds of people against the truth.

You may have heard a gospel preacher read the following verse from the Bible. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT PREJUDICE

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost and convinced many of those people that the One they crucified was Jesus Christ, they were cut to the heart. They believed what Peter preached and asked what to do. Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Now notice in this same chapter verse forty-one, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." Then on down in verse forty-seven, it says, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This is an example of what takes place when the people are not prejudicial.

Let me give another example. In Acts the eighth chapter, when the Ethiopian eunuch was returning from Jerusalem to his homeland, Philip met him and preached unto him Jesus. And the eunuch, after he heard Jesus preached, said, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" When he learned the truth, he wanted to obey it.

Life is too short for a man to be so prejudicial that he will refuse to accept the truth when shown what the truth is on any subject.

14

Jesus Our Saviour

Jesus Christ is the greatest person the world has ever known. He is not only the greatest of the great and the wisest of the wise, He taught the great, greatness and the wise, wisdom. He changed the history of the world in three short years. He revolutionized the grave in three short days.

Jesus Christ is great in His eternal existence with God. "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

Our Lord is great in His knowledge. "And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:25).

Peter gave us the bottom line of the love of God when he said, "Lord, thou knowest all things" (John 21:17).

Jesus is great in His power. "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

Jesus is great in His love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But Jesus laid down His life for His enemies. We should love, respect, and obey the Lord, because He is our only hope of ever going to heaven.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (First Peter

3:15). The exaltation of Christ to the priesthood after the order of Melchizedic offers to the Christian the only real and everlasting hope he has in this world and in the world to come.

This hope that Jesus offers is not diminished by tribulations, but on the contrary, is strengthened by it and is, accordingly termed a helmet. "But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation" (First Thessalonians 5:8).

The Christian hope, in all probability, is the strongest incentive to encourage the child of God to remain faithful in the face of heartaches and tribulations. Seeing, therefore, that we have such solid ground to build upon, such a full assurance of faith, we may cast the anchor of our hope on God's eternal shore and walk through the valley of death fearing no evil. It was upon the doctrine of hope that Christ taught the greatest lessons known to man. By it Jesus taught His disciples to be patient in tribulation, to suffer cruel persecution because of this hope that Jesus offered. Through protracted sickness and a thousand temptations they proved their fidelity to God, sustained by this glorious hope.

When the enemies of Christianity would take the apostle Paul and beat him across his back until his shoulder blades looked like white caps in a sea of blood, and with every lick the muscles tighten, the flesh quivers, the blood flows, and yet this great man of God continued with his preaching. Why? Because he was sustained by the glorious hope that Jesus Christ offered.

How could those early Christians march into the arena facing the bloodthirsty lions? They knew they had obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, and all was well with their souls.

When one of the early Christians was being burned at the stake, he said to the tormentor just before he set fire to him, "Feel of my pulse and see if it is not calmer than yours." When his fingers lighted up like candles, the Christian prayed for the tormentors. Why? Because he knew in whom he had believed.

Jesus Christ is our hope because He is the Divine Son of

God. Since God made Adam, there have been billions of people, but Jesus Christ is the only person that ever lived on this earth, who was both human and Divine, both God and man. He was not part man and part God while on the earth, but was all God and all man.

A real and genuine hope cannot be found in the scientific discoveries of man. Our hope is not in summit meetings of the leaders of powerful nations of the world. Our hope is not in the discovery of facts we may learn by going to the moon or learning if there is life on Mars. Our hope is not in nuclear powers. Our hope is not in becoming a mighty and powerful nation. Our hope is not in the knowledge of medicine, education, philosophy, phenomenology, not the wisdom of man. Our hope is in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace and Priest of the Most High God.

Hundreds of years before Christ was born, Isaiah prophesied of His coming; "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Matthew quotes from the Old Testament in referring to Jesus. "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:22-23).

The hope of the human family centers in and around Jesus of Nazareth. He is the only Physician that has shown Himself able to heal the soul's deepest maladies. He is the only one who has a heart large enough to take in the whole human race. Some have been able to love a few individuals; we call them benevolent men. Some have been able to love certain classes; we call them philanthropists. Some have been able to love a nation; we call them patriots. But Jesus of Nazareth is the only One whose philanthropy broke down all barriers of race, class, or nationality, and embraced all men of all races.

All philosophers, with their imperfect teaching, have faded away and are almost forgotten; but the teachings of Jesus command the attention of the learned and the ignorant, the great and the small. The church has succeeded and will continue to succeed because we have Jesus leading us to victory. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44).

The Jews had their Moses; Rome had her Caesar; France had her Napoleon; England had her Gladstone; America had her Washington; but thanks be to God the church has Jesus Christ as the Captain of our salvation. If it were possible for George Washington, the father of our country, to walk into our midst, we would rise to our feet; but if Jesus Christ, the Founder of the church, should walk into our midst, we would fall to our knees. Jesus is our Saviour, and for this reason we should love, respect, and obey Him. We must remember that He is the only Saviour we have and the only one we will ever have.

If Jesus Christ is not the only begotten Son of God, He is the greatest imposter the world has ever known. If Jesus was only a man while upon earth, He propagated the greatest fraud known to man. He claimed to be the Son of God, and all His claims proved to be true. Listen, as He speaks of Himself: "I am the truth"; "I am the way"; "I am the light of the world"; "I am greater than Solomon"; "I am greater than the temple"; He who has seen me has seen the Father"; "I am the door"; "I am the good shepherd"; "I have come down from above"; "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again"; "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall never pass away." No one in the history of the world ever made such claims and proved them to be true, other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

It has been two thousand years since Jesus lived on this earth, and man still stands in amazement at His teaching. The sermon that Jesus preached on the mount has never died. It has been the admiration of the greatest minds in all the ages that have intervened. In its profundity, in its suggestiveness, in its simplicity, in its purity of sentiment, in its deep spirituality, in its comprehensiveness, in its majestic sweep, in its practical bearing upon life, it stands unapproached by anything man has ever been able to utter. If the world is standing ten thousand years from now, man will never write nor speak anything comparable to the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus is our hope because He is the only One that ever practiced to perfection everything He taught. Jesus Christ reached the point of perfection in every word He spoke; in every deed He performed, and every thought He ever had. He was as much at ease in Pilate's judgment hall during His mock trial as He was on the mountain side teaching His disciples. He manifested in a superlative degree everything that was pure, good and Holy.

Jesus Christ as a teacher never hedged, dodged, nor sidestepped any question. He always faced the issues and placed the emphasis where it belonged. His teaching was so simple and plain that the only ones that misunderstood Him were those who closed their eyes and stopped their ears. Anyone who follows in the footsteps of Jesus as a teacher will have no trouble nor difficulty in making himself known on any doctrinal matter.

Jesus is the most Original Thinker the world has ever known. Hear with what authority He speaks concerning this matter.

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:38-39).

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you'' (Matthew 5:43-44).

Jesus Christ was the greatest in making contrasts. When He wanted to make a contrast between the heavenly and the earthly, He said, ''Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'' (Matthew 6:19-21).

When He wanted to make a contrast between two masters, He said; ''No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon'' (Matthew 6:24).

When Jesus wanted to make a contrast between man and the vegetable kingdom, He said, ''And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?'' (Matthew 6:28-30).

When Jesus made a contrast between man and the lower animal kingdom, He said, ''Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?'' (Matthew 6:26).

All the educators, intellectual giants, and teachers of the world have never given to the world methods of teaching as great as those used by Jesus Christ.

Christ's teaching, as exhibited both in word and deed, is characterized by entire freedom from mistakes. What other teacher ever lived that did not have to amend or take something back that he said? Jesus Christ spoke the absolute and final truth on every subject He ever discussed.

The Sermon on the Mount is just as practical today as it was when first spoken by the world's greatest Teacher. We need to be preaching it from every mountain top, and the people in the valley will hear and many will respond.

We have shown that Jesus is the greatest Teacher that ever graced this earth, but did He practice what He taught? Yes, He is the only one who practiced to perfection what He taught. Let us notice His teaching and His practice. He taught, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Does His practice agree with His teaching?

We see Him at Jacob's well. He is talking to a fallen Samaritan woman; a woman who had been married five times, and now was living with a man who was not her husband. She was living in such open shame that you and I would hardly dare recognize or speak to her on the street.

When this woman came to draw water at Jacob's well, Jesus, though tired, hungry and thirsty, taught her a great lesson on worship. This woman was so excited over the lesson that Jesus taught that she left her water pot, and went into the city and said to the people, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29).

How did Jesus deal with the woman who had been taken in adultery, and the men who brought her to Him? "They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:4-11).

Again observe His teaching and His practice, "Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Did He practice this teaching? Yes, while Jesus was hanging on Calvary's cross, He prayed, "Forgive them, they know not what they do."

There was absolutely no discrepancies between what He taught and what He practiced. Napoleon once compared the life and teachings of Jesus to himself, Caesar, Alexander, Socrates, Plato, and others, and said, "I know men, and I tell you that the resemblance between Jesus Christ and the founders of great empires and great teachers of the world does not exist." There is between Jesus Christ and all other teachers the distance of infinity. Yes, He practiced to perfection everything He taught.

Jesus is our hope because His blood can cleanse us of our sins. In every continent of the world and on every island of the sea, man is conscious of sin. The oldest temples of the world point their steeples toward heaven as a silent plea for man's forgiveness of sins.

Records that have been dug up from the jungles of Mexico, or from the mud of Mesopotamia, or from the Nile valley show that man has always wept, knelt, and prayed because of sin. When man visits places where the people have never seen a Bible, or heard of Jesus Christ, yet, these people are conscious of sin.

We are living in an age when the very air we breathe is reeking with sin. We are living in an age when we see mighty nations attack, destroy, and wreak their passions upon weaker ones. We see America so involved in sin that we wonder how long God will let her stand before He raises up another nation to bring America to her knees.

If truth is going to be victorious over error, right over wrong, God over Satan, then all of God's enemies must be destroyed. God will only tolerate sin so long. When Sodom and Gomorrah reached a certain degree of sin, God destroyed them. God destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. Look at the nations of the world that have fallen because of sin. America is, in all probability, one of the most wicked nations in the world today.

Unless we are able to have enough Christian people who can, to some degree, hold back this terrible tide of wickedness, God may raise up Red China, or Russia, or some other nation to bring America to her knees.

Sin is a violation of God's law, a rebellion against God. Sin is a disrespect for law and order. God cannot overlook sin. It is an eternal law of God that the wages of sin is death. Though sin has become socially popular, anyone who believes it does not carry with it the doom of individual and national calamity is as foolish in his belief as one who could believe that a spider's web could keep a huge boulder from rolling down a mountain side.

Sin is as treacherous as Absalom who would do us obeisance and the same time try to steal our hearts from God. Sin is as deceptive as left-handed Ehud, hiding his dagger under his coat, extending his right hand in friendship, and using his left hand to plunge the dagger through the stomach. Sin is as hypercritical as Judas, professing love with kisses and soft words, yet eager to betray us unto death. Sin is the eldest born of hell. Sin is worse than the devil for it was sin that made him the devil.

Jesus Christ is the One and the only One who can take away this sin. The prophets of God talked about sin, but they never could take away sin. "Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither molified with ointment'' (Isaiah 1:5-6).

Jeremiah cried his heart out because of sin, but he could not take away sin. ''Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people'' (Lamentations 3:48). Jeremiah could not take away sin because no angel, prophet, apostle, nor anyone other than the Lord Jesus could do this. ''And thou shall call his name *Jesus:* for he shall save his people from their sins'' (Matthew 1:21).

Jesus is our only hope because He is the only One great enough to save us. Jesus is so great that every place He visited became a sacred spot. People from all over the world visit what is called the ''Holy Land.'' Why? Well, it is not because of the fertility of the soil, not its natural beauty, but simply because our Lord lived there.

When people visit that land the conversation goes after this order: It was in this town that He raised the dead; It was in this village that He cast out evil spirits; It was in this community that He healed the daughter of the woman of Canaan; It was at this well that He taught the woman of Samaria the truth about worship; It was here that He healed the lepers; It was in this garden where He often went to pray; It was on this mountain where He taught the multitude; It was in this wilderness that He was tempted by Satan; It was in this upper room where He instituted the Lord's supper; It was on this hill where He wept over Jerusalem; It was in this stream where He was baptized; It was out of that cloud that the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove.

Jesus Christ is so great that the little boat in which He sat to teach His disciples has been talked about more than the greatest seagoing vessels; such as, the *Queen Elizabeth* or the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, or the *Saratoga*. Why? Because Jesus sat in that little boat, and that made the difference.

When He made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He rode upon a little donkey. That little donkey upon which Jesus rode has been talked about more than the most beautiful Tennessee walking horse, or the most graceful Kentucky race horse, or the most elegant Arabian stallion. Why? Because Jesus

Christ rode upon the back of that little donkey.

How does Jesus compare with the great of the earth? Let us imagine a comparison. Someone might have said to Him, "I belong to the nobility, I was born in a palace." Christ would have said, "I belong to the peasantry; I was born in a stable." One might have said, "I graduated at Athens, the great university town. Christ would have replied, "I never went to school a day in my life."

Can such a man attract men? Can He draw a crowd? Let us observe. "And seeing the *multitude,* he went up into a mountain. And when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them."

Mothers brought their children to have Him lay His hands on them. When He entered Jerusalem men cast branches in the way and shouted, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest." When they would stone Him, He passed through their midst, and no man dared to hinder Him. Those who crucified Him, cried out at the crucifixion, saying, "This was truly the Son of God." It is no wonder that the prophet of God said that His name would be called, "Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

15

What Shall It Profit Thee?

Mark 8:36, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Everybody is interested in certain words in this question; profit, gain, and loss. The tragedy is that so many are interested only in profit and gain.

We live in a materialistic age when great value is placed upon worldly possessions, and Jesus points up the fact that the soul is more valuable than all earthly wealth. Most values fluctuate. This is true of bonds, stocks, real estate, and even money.

But the soul of man has always been worth more than the whole world. The value of the soul has never changed. It has been the most valuable thing in the world since the beginning of time.

Neither money itself nor the acquiring of it is sinful. But the coveting of it, and the using of it for evil purposes become the curse that ruins the soul, and will entangle it in crisis that will eventually destroy the soul. The value of the soul is seen in its origin. God said, "Let us make man in our image and after our likeness." Man is made in God's image with the faculty to discern between right and wrong with a mind to apprehend the truth. We must remember the soul did not just happen to be, but it was created by Jehovah.

The value of the soul is seen in the efforts that both heaven and hell put forth for the soul. Heaven invites. John 14:2-3, "In my Father's houses are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Hebrews 2:9, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."

Jesus stands with outstretched arms saying to every accountable being, "Come unto me and I will give you rest."

The devil is also interested in the soul, but his interest is to destroy the soul.

First Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

He seeks to keep men from hearing the gospel and turn those who have heard from light to darkness. All of his efforts are to destroy the soul in hell.

The value of the soul may be seen in the price paid for it. God put such a value upon the soul that He gave His Son to die on Calvary's cross to redeem the soul.

Paul speaks of that gift as God's unspeakable gift (Second Corinthians 9:15).

When one thinks of giving his son for some cause, he can, to some small degree, understand what a great price God paid to redeem the soul.

First Peter 1:18-19, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

We value things by the price paid for them. In view of what was paid for the soul, we know the value of the soul is worth more than the whole world and everything in it.

The question Jesus asked implies that a person can lose his soul. To lose the soul does not mean that the soul is annihilated, but that it is separated from God forever, never in fellowship with God's family. It will never enjoy that peace that passes all understanding. It will suffer the loss of happiness, hope of heaven, the loss of God, of God's favor, of God's love, God's protection, and God's redemption. It will be lost in a devil's hell forever and ever.

Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Sin is the destructive power over the soul that causes it to be lost. John 8:21, "Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come."

The question warns man of the danger of exchanging his soul. One may exchange his soul for everyday cares. It is so easy to become involved in the affairs of the world that we crowd Jesus out of our lives. Many men have become so involved in the world that they have no time for the family or the church.

Those who are unfaithful in their attendance are not necessarily bad or immoral people; but those people who have become so involved in the affairs of the world that they don't have time to go to Bible study or to visit the sick have crowded Jesus Christ out of their lives and exchanged their souls for the material things of the world.

Luke 10:41-42, "And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Some exchange their souls for evil associations. You need not tell me who you are or what kind of family you have. Just tell me who your friends and associates are, and I will know all about you. One does not see the most righteous associating with the most wicked. We become a part of those with whom we associate. It is very difficult for any of us to do wrong when we are in the presence of the righteous. We should always encourage our young people to associate with those of good character.

Paul warned of evil companionship. First Corinthians 15:33, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."

First Corinthians 5:6, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

Some exchange their souls for false doctrine. Much warning is given throughout the Bible concerning false doctrine.

Colossians 2:8, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

Some submit to false doctrine because it is an easy religion, or because it is a popular religion.

While preaching in a meeting in Texas, one told me of a very humble family who was faithful to Christ. Oil was found on the farm, and they became very wealthy. They began to grow weak spiritually. They moved into Dallas and joined the largest denomination in that city. These people exchanged their souls for popularity and false doctrine.

Matthew 15:9, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Some exchange their souls for a life of ease. The brethren in Laodicea exchanged their souls for a life of ease. They had drifted into an easy-going way and satisfied themselves with keeping things up to a fair average.

They preferred quiet evenings at home in preference to the house of God. The gospel whip must be lashed around the shoulders of such people that they may be brought to their spiritual senses.

Many members have never abandoned any comfort for Christ, much less made a sacrifice for Him. Some people have never given up anything that is dear to them that the church might prosper.

In the long ago God warned His people through the prophet Amos. In Amos 6:1, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion. . . ." The fields are white unto harvest, but the laborers are few. How can someone be at ease in Zion when the world is lost? My friends, don't exchange your souls for a life of ease.

This question teaches man cannot have everything. One cannot have his cake and also eat it. One cannot live a righteous life and at the same time live a wicked life. One cannot serve God and at the same time serve Satan. One cannot run with hounds and hold to rabbits. One cannot sow to the flesh and reap eternal life.

Christ said, "He that is not for me is against me." He also said, "Every house divided against itself cannot stand."

Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

A younger preacher was talking to an older preacher and said to him, "I would give the world to preach like you." The older preacher replied, "Young man, that is what it cost me — the world!"

Christians are exhorted to give up the world. First John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Someone has said there are three doors in life, and man can travel through only one of them. He has the privilege of choosing which door he will pass through, as he makes his journey through this world.

Over one of the doors are these words, "He who travels through this door shall learn that which pleases is but for a moment." Over the second door are these words, "He who travels through this door will learn that which troubles is but for a moment." Over the last door are these words, "He who travels through this door will learn that only that which is important endures forever."

The question also teaches that to lose the soul is the most tragic loss in the world. The word *lost* is a sad word.

For instance, what shall a man profit if he shall gain the whole world and lose his health? Or, what shall a man profit if he shall gain the whole world and become sick and cannot enjoy it? What good is the best food in the world if man cannot eat? Or, the most luxurious automobile if one is too sick to ride in it?

These things are bad, but the losing of the soul is a million times worse. In fact, it is the most terrible thing that could happen to an individual.

It is sad for the soul to be lost because it will be lost forever. If the soul was lost for a million years, it would not be so bad compared to eternity. After the soul had been in the torments of hell for five hundred thousand years, it could say, "It is half over." After the soul had been in hell for nine hundred thousand years, it could say, "Just another one hundred thousand years and I'll be out of this awful place of torment." And sometimes, somewhere out there in the future those one hundred thousand years go by, and the soul would be out of torment.

But this is not the way it is, my friends. The soul that is lost will be lost for eternity. The word *eternity* is found only one time in the Bible in Isaiah 57:15. This word is one of the most fearful words I have ever studied. God with His all-powerful Hand has wound that clock of eternity. It will tick and tick and tick. The walls of hell will never scar; the hair of God will never silver; the locks on the dungeon will never corrode; the miserable soul will be lost forever and forever.

This question teaches that man is a free moral agent. Man has the ability and prerogative to make his own choice. If one chooses to obey God, he will profit as did Paul, Peter, Barnabas, and all the faithful throughout all ages. It is possible for man to make a small temporary gain at the expense, many times, of losing his soul.

Let us now look at some Bible examples where certain ones thought they were making great gains, when in reality they suffered a great loss.

Question: What did Cain gain in killing Abel?
Answer: The gratification of revenge.
Result: He lost God's favor and became a wanderer upon the earth.

Question: What did Lot gain by pitching his tent toward Sodom?
Answer: He dwelt among the Sodomites.
Result: Lost his wealth and most of his family.

Question: What did Achan gain in his theft?
Answer: A golden wedge, thirty pieces of silver, a Babylonish garment.
Result: He lost his life.

Question: What did Ahab gain by killing Naboth?
Answer: A vineyard.
Result: He lost his life.

Question: What did Judas gain by selling Jesus?
Answer: Thirty pieces of silver.
Result: He hanged himself and lost his soul.

Question: What did Ananias and Sapphira gain by lying about their giving?
Answer: A portion of their wealth.
Result: They lost their lives and souls.

Question: What did the rich fool gain?
Answer: One day of ease.
Result: Lost his soul.

We learn from these examples that many times that which seems to be a profit may be a great loss.

There is a vine in Brazil called the matador or murderer. It will climb a vigorous tree with a clinging grasp. As it climbs, it sends out arm-like tendrils that embrace the tree, and as it ascends, it grows tighter and tighter around the tree. It finally reaches the top of the tree, and by this time the tree is strangled to death. It is in this way that materialism will grasp and strangle to death its devotees.

If we are not careful, we will place our values in the wrong place. Ruskin relates the story of a man who was shipwrecked. Before leaving the vessel, he bound around him a belt containing some gold bars, then adjusted the life preserver and slipped into the water. But the gold more than offset the life belt, and he sank to the bottom and perished. "Now," says Ruskin, "did he have the gold, or did the gold have him?" The man gained the gold but lost his life.

A woman's house caught fire. She became very active in moving furniture out of the house. Then she thought of her child. The fire had cut her off from the child's room. She saved the furniture, but she lost her child.

Jesus says,"What has a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

16

Christ Above All

John 3:31, "He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all."

We have in America today all the sins that made old powerful Rome a branchless and fruitless tree.

We have in America today all the sins and evils that made old ancient Greece, with all her culture, art, music and oratory, the world's garbage can.

We have all the sins in America today that made old proud Babylon a vermin-infested animal to roam the wild jungles.

We have in America today all the sins and evils that made old Ninevah a dirty floormat for the world.

We have in America today all the sins and evils that made old Spain with her ships of piracy, that harassed all the seas, become a filthy begger to the rest of the world.

We are living in an age when we see the strong overcome the weak and wreak their passion upon them. We are living in an age when millions believe that might makes right. We read of huge armies marching through lands of right, burning, murdering and destroying, and we cry, "All of this because of sin."

We are living in an age when we see, in many parts of the world, the poor oppressed and the underprivileged abused, the ignorant mistreated, and the handicapped given very little consideration.

Who is the solution to all of these problems? The magicians of Egypt? The Magi of Persia? Buddha of India? Confucius of China? Or Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God?

The answer must come from all properly informed people that Jesus Christ is the answer and the solution to all of man's troubles.

Listen to Paul in Philippians 2:5-11, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

These words were spoken by the man who wrote most of the books of the New Testament; the man who had been beaten, falsely accused and thrown into prison because of his dedication to Christ. In spite of the persecution and imprisonment, he compassed the known world with the truths of God; put out the fires on the altar of Diana; carried the story of the blood-stained banner of Jesus Christ over a wider territory than the Roman eagle shadowed; the man who counted all things but loss that he might win Christ.

John the Baptist also speaks concerning Jesus Christ. When John the Baptist descended upon the sin-blighted world with a sword in one hand and a torch in the other, his words were like a two-edged sword that pierced the hearts of the hypocritical Pharisees, the unbelieving Saducees, and all who were guilty of violating the law of God. He had no diploma from the Jewish Sanhedrin, nor the endorsement of the Pharisees or Saducees. I doubt that any of our city churches would have him as their local preacher today, even though he was one of the great preachers of all time.

He preached with such force that people closed their places of business to go out into the wilderness of Judea to hear him.

Matthew 3:5-6, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."

John, in speaking of Jesus, said in Matthew 3:11, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."

When one sets his mind, heart and mouth to portray the fullness of Christ, all that He was, is, and evermore shall be, His goodness, His mercy, His grace, he sets himself to a task that all the silver-tongued orators of the world could never do. With the tongues of angels, one could never describe His greatness and goodness.

Can a small piece of cheese on a mouse trap satisfy a hungry lion? Can a child play on a tin whistle one of the great pieces of music written by Beethoven? Can a small coal of fire warm the whole world on a cold night? Can a rosebud perfume the whole polluted world?

Then, no more can man, with his wisdom, oratory, and education, describe the greatness of Christ. "No voice can sing, nor heart can frame, nor can the memory find a sweeter sound than thy blessed name, O Savior of mankind."

No man can with Him compare. He is the greatest of the great and the wisest of the wise. He is truly our everything.

He is heaven's bread for earth's hunger. He is heaven's water for man's thirst. He is heaven's light for man's darkness. He is heaven's grace for man's sin. He is heaven's clothing for man's nakedness. He is heaven's wisdom for man's folly. He is heaven's peace for man's strife. He is heaven's justification for man's condemnation. He is heaven's love for man's hate. He is heaven's life for man's death.

Oh, who can paint Him. Oh, who can describe Him? Wonder, praise, admiration, and oratory fade into muteness when one tries to describe the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. HE IS ABOVE ALL IN HIS SOURCE

John 5:23, "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, who hath sent him."

He was with God and had glory with His Father before the beginning of the world. He was and is this day co-existent, co-essential, co-equal, and co-eternal with God. Jesus said, "The Father and I are one." He is the way, the truth, and the light, and no one can go to the Father except through Him. "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent me."

No husband has been so one with the wife of his bosom as God and Christ are One. No wife has ever been so one with the husband of her heart as God and Christ are One. The glory They had with Each Other before the world was created cannot be fully comprehended with the finite mind.

No rays of light ever came so brightly from the sun; no water ever came so crystalline clear from its original fountain; no fragrance ever came so sweetly from the flower as the Holy, Holy, Father's heart with His Son before the world began.

In John 8:58, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

Jesus Christ was with His Father when He placed all the stars in outer space. Jesus Christ was with His Father when He placed the moon in position that looks like a yellow rose in a garden of diamonds. Jesus Christ was with His Father when He made man and was standing by His side when with the wisdom, that no earthly physician has ever known, took from Adam's side a rib, and made for him a helpmeet.

This vast universe in which we live is a large autograph album made up of mountains, valleys, land, sea, atoms, and molecules, the signature of Jesus is everywhere. The heavens declare the glory of God!

II. JESUS IS ABOVE ALL IN HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

Colossians 1:15-18, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Hebrews 1:1-2, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

Who made the rivers of the world? The mighty Mississippi, the Nile, the river Jordan, the Danube, the Amazon, the Zambize, and all the mountains and the rivers of the world? The answer is Jesus Christ.

Who threw out the first rays of light that looked like archangels in flames of fire? It was Jesus Christ.

Who started the planets in their speed with such accuracy that they do not run one fraction of a second ahead or behind, and with such precision in their movements that astronomers can tell the exact time of the eclipse of the sun hundreds of years in advance? The answer is Jesus Christ.

Who painted the first flower, and put the song in the throat of the mockingbird? The answer is Jesus Christ.

Who made the gorgeous colors of the rainbow and capped the Alps with the driven snow? The answer is Jesus Christ.

Oh, all things were created for Him and by Him. No one, other than God and the Holy Spirit, ever sustained such a close relationship to the universe as does Jesus Christ.

III. JESUS CHRIST IS ABOVE ALL THE WAY HE CAME INTO THE WORLD

No one has ever come into the world the way Jesus made His advent. In eternity He rested on His Father's bosom without a mother. While on earth He rested on His mother's bosom without an earthly father, for Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit.

God, in the Garden of Eden, took from the bosom of man a motherless woman, and in the city of Bethlehem, God took from the bosom of woman a fatherless child. Did you ever hear of a child being as old as its mother? Did you ever hear of a baby being older than its mother? The answer is no. But Jesus was ages older than His mother.

Jesus, who created man, became man. And Jesus, who made all flesh, became flesh. He became flesh when that little virgin, who had never known man, went down into the mysterious land of motherhood, and when she came up out of the valley of death, she had the Saviour of the world in her arms.

Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."

I have no use for any version of the Bible that translates Isaiah 7:14 by putting *woman* instead of *virgin*. One could be a prostitute and be a woman. She was a virgin, not just a woman. The whole scheme of redemption depends upon the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

IV. HE WAS ABOVE ALL AS THE REVEALER OF GOD

When Jesus was getting ready to go to the cross, then through the grave, and back home to glory, He said in John 14:1-9, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?"

There must have been tears in the eyes of Jesus, when He answered Philip, and said, "Have I not been with you so long, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?"

While Jesus was upon the earth He exegeted God. While on earth He was the exegesis of God. It was through Jesus Christ that the voice of God broke into full voice.

What Jesus Christ was to the publican, the harlot, the prodigal, the hypocrite, the sinner, the outcast, the rich, the poor, men and women, to everybody, everywhere that is what God is today.

It was through the eyes of Jesus, God looked out. It was through the hands of Jesus, God reached out. It was through the voice of Jesus, God spoke out. It was through the feet of Jesus, God walked out. It was through the ears of Jesus, God listened out. It was through the heart of Jesus, God loved out.

Paul sums it up when he said in Second Corinthians 5:19, "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation."

While Jesus was upon the earth, He revealed to man what God was like. He could make the blind see, because He made the eye. He could make the deaf hear, because He made the ear. He could restore the withered hand, because He made the hand. There was never a dead man He could not raise.

There was never an evil spirit He could not cast out. There was never a storm He could not calm. There was never a broken heart He could not heal. There was never a brokenhearted sinner He could not save, if that sinner would trust and obey Him.

V. JESUS IS ABOVE ALL AS A TEACHER

John 7:46, "The officers answered, Never man spake like this man."

These words were spoken by officers who were sent to arrest Jesus. What a police report! Did He hide? No. Did He run? No. Was He protected by a group of people. No. Did He bribe you? No. Was He Sick? No. Why did you not arrest Him? Their reply was that they had never heard a man talk like that Man, so they did not arrest Him.

There have been many great teachers — Plato, Socrates, Demosthenes — but Jesus Christ stands out above all as a mighty oak among the smallest of plants.

Put all the powerful teachers of the world on one hand and Jesus on the other, and there is as much difference in them as there are speculation and revelation; as much difference as in groping and guidance; as much difference as in black and white, pure and impure, sin and righteousness.

He was the world's only original Thinker. In Matthew 5:27-28, He said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Matthew 5:38-39, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; But I say unto you that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Matthew 5:43-44, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

There has never been any teacher in any age of the world who could compare with Jesus as an original thinker.

No one in any age of the world could make such glaring contrasts as could Jesus Christ. When He wanted to make a contrast between the earthly and the heavenly, He said in Matthew 6:19-20, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasurers in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

When He wanted to make a contrast between the two masters, He said in Matthew 6:24, "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

When He wanted to make a comparison between man and the lower animal kingdom, He said in Matthew 6:26, "Behold, the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"

When He wanted to make a contrast between man and the vegetable kingdom, He said in Matthew 6:28-30, "And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

The sermon that Christ taught on the mount has never died. It has been the wonder and admiration of the greatest minds in all the ages that have intervened. In its profundity, in its suggestiveness, in its simplicity, in its comprehensiveness, in its majestic sweep, in its practical bearing upon life — it stands unapproached by anything man has ever uttered or will be able to speak.

Socrates said, "That the teacher, that must come, must be more than a man that he may teach things impossible for man to know."

But the question is, did Christ practice what He taught?

Let us observe His teaching in view of His practice and compare them.

In Matthew 16:26, Jesus said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Does His practice agree with His teaching? We see Him at Jacob's well. He is talking to a fallen Samaritan woman — a woman who had had five husbands, and was living with a man, who was not her husband. She was living in such open shame that you and I would hardly dare to recognize or speak to her on the street. When this woman came to Jacob's well to draw water, Jesus, though hungry and thirsty, preached to her one of the most wonderful sermons man ever heard.

The woman then left her water pot and went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" How did He value the soul of the adulterous woman who was brought into His presence? John 8:7, "So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

Christ also taught in Matthew 5:44, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

But the question is, did He practice to perfection what He taught His disciples to do?

Luke 23:34, "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots."

There were absolutely no discrepancies between what He taught and what He practiced. Napoleon once compared the life and teachings of Jesus to himself, Caesar, Alexander, Socrates, Plato, and others, and said, "I know men, and I tell you that the resemblance between Jesus Christ and the founders of great empires and the gods of other religions does not exist. There is between Jesus Christ and all other teachers the distance of infinity."

Thus He practiced to perfection everything He ever taught.

VI. CHRIST IS ABOVE ALL IN HIS SUFFERING

Isaiah 53:3-7, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

No one has been more mistreated than was the Son of God. They called Him mean, ugly, hateful names; a glutton, a liar, a winebibber, a deceiver, a blasphemer, an illegitimate child. But God said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Notice some of the ways they mistreated Him. They said, "If He is a king, we will testify with our mouth." So they spit in His face. "If He is a king, we need to reach out our hands to Him." So they beat Him in the face with their fists. "If He is a king, He needs some kind of insignia." So they scourged Him almost to death. "If He is a king, He needs a crown." So they crowned Him with thorns. "If He is a king, He needs a royal procession." So they made Him lead the procession, carrying His own cross on which He was to be crucified. "If He is a king, He deserves a cup." So they lifted up a sponge filled with vinegar and put it to His mouth. "If

He is a king, He needs a coronation outcry." So they shouted, "He saved others, but cannot save Himself. If He is the Son of God, let Him prove it and come down from the cross."

In Second Corinthians 5:21, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

VII. JESUS IS ABOVE ALL IN HIS DEATH

They took Jesus down from the cross a bloody corpse and carried Him away to the grave. On this day hell shouted for joy; death waved her black banner in victory; sighs ran along amid the bones of the patriarchs and a wail of woe was heard in the sepulchers of the dead.

They took Him and buried Him. Sixty-four soldiers were send to watch and guard His tomb. They had been told that He said He would rise from the dead. So they were there to guard His tomb and to keep someone from stealing His body.

But on the third day He came forth triumphant over death and the grave. Angels came to roll away the stone, not to let Jesus out, He was already out, but to let man in.

Mark 16:6, "And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted; Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified; he is risen; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him."

VIII. JESUS IS ABOVE ALL IN HIS AUTHORITY

Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."

Acts 3:22-23, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."

What has this One with all authority commanded? Listen to Him. John 8:24, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

Luke 13:3, "I tell you, Nay. But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Matthew 10:32, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."

Matthew 28:19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

Have you obeyed these commands? After one becomes a Christian, he is to live a faithful Christian life.

Where have you placed this Jesus who suffered so much for you? Where have you placed Him in your home? Where have you placed Him in your business? Where have you placed Him in your church life?

He will be your all in all if you obey Him. He will be your light in darkness; comfort in sorrow; strength in weakness; wisdom in folly; help in danger; director in doubt; and your Saviour from all sins.

Will you let Him have His way with you? Will you open your heart and let Jesus come into your heart this day?

17

Thou Shalt Not Kill

In Exodus the twentieth chapter, we read that God called Moses upon Mt. Sinai and gave to him the first written law that God ever gave to man. This law is known as the Ten Commandment law. In verse thirteen of this chapter, we read these words, "Thou shalt not kill." This is the sixth commandment in the Decalogue.

In order that we might have a better understanding and broader conception of what this commandment means, let us discuss, first of all, what it is not talking about.

In the first place, this commandment is not talking about the killing of animals. There are some vegetarians who refuse to eat meat because they say the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill," and they think this refers to the killing of animals. However, this is not true.

In Exodus 20:24, "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."

Here God is commanding man to erect altars and offer animal sacrifices.

In John 6:9-11, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would."

Here we have Jesus offering thanks for the loaves and the fishes, and the people ate the loaves and the fishes on this occasion. So this verse is not talking about the killing of animals.

This verse is not talking about capital punishment. There are those people who do not believe in capital punishment because the Bible says, "Thou shalt not kill" (Exodus 20:13). But this verse is not talking about capital punishment. Other verses in the Bible do, but this one is not discussing that subject. For in the very next chapter (Exodus 21:) we read, "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall surely be put to death." So if the verse, "Thou shalt not kill" is talking about capital punishment, in a few verses below we have God saying that a man should be put to death. So this verse is not discussing capital punishment.

In Romans the twelfth chapter and the first part of the thirteenth chapter, we read of man's fourfold relationship.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

In Romans 12:1-2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

Here we are told that man is to be totally committed to God. God comes first in our lives. Paul is teaching here what Jesus Christ taught in Matthew 6:33, when He said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

So my duty, my relationship, and my responsibility to God is to put God first in my life, in my thinking, and in everything I do.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OUR BRETHREN

Also in this same chapter we are told what our relationship is to our brethren. Beginning with verse nine through verse thirteen, we read these words, "Let love be without dissimulation." That is without hypocrisy. "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality."

In my relationship with my brethren, I am to conduct myself as Paul teaches in these verses. My love for my brethren is to be without hypocrisy. That is, it is to be pure and genuine. We are to be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love. In honor we are to prefer one another. We are to be fervent in spirit serving the Lord. We are to rejoice in hope. We are to be patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer. We are to distribute to the necessity of the saints. We are to be given to hospitality. This is my relationship to my brethren.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OUR ENEMIES

Also in this same chapter we read of our relationship to our enemies; those in the church or out of the church.

In verses nineteen through twenty-one, Paul said, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." That is my relationship to my enemy.

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO OUR GOVERNMENT

In chapter 13:1-4, we read of our relationship to the government. Now let us remember that the Bible was divided into chapters and verses by man. When this was written, it was just one long, continuous letter. And therefore after the apostle said, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good," he said, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

In this reading we have (1) divine prohibition, (2) a divine promise, (3) a divine procedure.

THE PROHIBITION

Let us observe first what this divine prohibition is. God said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." God prohibits me from taking vengeance. I cannot do this because vengeance belongs to God.

In Deuteronomy 32:35, "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense."

In Psalm 94:1, "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself."

In Ezekiel 25:17, "And I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them."

Therefore God does not permit me to take vengeance upon people. I cannot do this for the simple reason that vengeance belongeth to God. You cannot take that which belongs to me without my permission. And God is simply saying, "I am not giving you permission to take vengeance because vengeance belongs to me."

But someone says, "That person has mistreated me, and I want to get even with him." Well, that's exactly what you do. You get even with him. You trim yourself down to his size.

For instance, an individual says mean, ugly, hateful things about you. Then you turn around and retaliate by saying mean, ugly, hateful things about him. Then you are just as bad as that individual. Therefore God does not permit us to do it.

In Matthew 5:44, Jesus Christ taught His disciples how to conduct themselves. He said, "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

And we are to grow in Christian maturity until we are able to do this. We cannot take something that belongs to someone else and use it for ourselves. Therefore vengeance is prohibited. God says, "Vengeance belongeth to me."

THE PROMISE

The divine promise is, "I will repay." That is, "I will punish the evil doers." God is simply saying, "You leave it to me. You will botch it up! I will do a good job." Every man who mistreats me or mistreats you, if that person does not repent and make that thing right, just as surely as that individual has mistreated you, God is going to take vengeance upon that person. Observe what He says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." Notice, "I will, I will, I will repay." The promises of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. So we have the divine promise that God is going to take vengeance upon these people who will mistreat us.

THE PROCEDURE

Then, there is divine procedure. How will God repay? I don't know all the ways that God will repay, but one way is through human government. But one says, "If you are a Christian, you can't be for vengeance." If you are a Christian, you must be for vengeance. You are not better than God, are you? God is for vengeance. And of course I am for vengeance, but it must be God's way. It cannot be V.P. Black's way!

Human governments are ordained of God. In Romans 13:1, Paul said, "The powers that be are ordained of God." So governments are ordained of God.

In Daniel 2:21, he said, ". . . he removeth kings and setteth up kings. . . ."

In John the nineteenth chapter, when Jesus Christ was being tried, and when He was standing before Pilate, Pilate was telling Jesus he had the power to release Him or to have Him crucified. But if you remember in verse eleven, Jesus replied to Pilate and said, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

Jesus Christ was simply saying to Pilate, "You wouldn't have any power if it had not been given to thee by Almighty God." So human governments are ordained by Jehovah.

Someone may ask, "If human governments are ordained by Jehovah, then why does God permit evil rulers?" I don't know. This may be one of the ways God has of rewarding evil people for evil deeds. When Paul wrote this letter, Nero was in charge. He was one of the most cruel, wicked human beings that possibly ever reigned. But the very fact that there are some evil rulers does not argue or prove that the government is wrong any more than we would argue or prove that the eldership is wrong because of some corrupt elder. I have known elders who were bad men, but that does not mean that the church itself is not the bride of Christ.

But these men, who are officials of the government of the state, are ordained of God. You think, for instance, even if there were no governments, you and I could not take vengeance, because vengeance belongs to God.

This is the reason Paul said in Romans 13:4, ". . . for he beareth not the sword in vain. . . ." Now the sword is an instrument of destruction. It does not say, "He beareth not the lash in vain," or, "He beareth not the whip in vain," or "He beareth not the razor strop in vain." It says "He beareth not the sword in vain." And the sword is tantamount to the electric chair, the gas chamber, or the gallows.

In Genesis 9:6, it says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." That anti-dates the law of Moses.

In Exodus 20:13, it says, "Thou shalt not kill." But in Exodus 21:12, it says, "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall surely be put to death."

So if the writer is saying in Exodus 20:13 that it is wrong for a man to be put to death, we have him contradicting himself in just a few verses below where it says, "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall surely be put to death."

In Acts 25:11, the apostle Paul says, "For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal to Caesar."

The context of that verse is this: that Festus had come into the province and after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem, and the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul. And desired favor against him that he would send him to Jerusalem. And the Bible says, "They were laying in wait to kill." But Festus said that Paul should be kept at Caesarea and that he would depart shortly for Caesarea. And when he did this, they came to Caesarea and hurled charges against the apostle Paul, and these charges were false. And after they made their charges, "Festus willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged; to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest." Now notice, "For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die" (Acts 25:11).

The apostle Paul in this verse is recognizing capital punishment and says, "If I have done anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die." That is, "I ought to die. I should be put to death, if I have done the things whereof they accuse me." But he said, "I am innocent. I have not done these things."

Now the first example of capital punishment that we read about is in Genesis the sixth chapter when God sent the flood upon the earth and put a whole generation of people in the gas chamber. Because when you mix hydrogen and gas you have water so that is the first example of a mass execution, and God was the one who did it.

REASONS FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

In the first place, the love of God demands it. I am aware of the fact these liberals and soft-headed judges could not understand this because they would ask, "How could a God of love punish someone?" Well, these liberals and soft-headed judges may not be able to understand it, but a father understands it. He punishes his child because he loves his child. A mother can understand it. She punishes her child because she loves her child. And a shepherd can understand it, when he loves his sheep, he hates wolves. And a farmer can understand it. When he loves his corn, he hates weeds. A righteous man can understand it, because when he loves righteousness, he hates sin. A moral man can understand it, because if he loves morality, he hates immorality. And so the love of God demands it.

We must have capital punishment for the welfare of society. God has set up governments to protect society. Man must be protected. We almost live in jails now. We lock our houses at night; we put bars on our windows. Why do we do these things? To keep thieves from breaking in and stealing what we have, or maybe killing us.

And just think what it would be if we didn't have laws to protect society. If an individual has a terrible malignancy, then sometimes he loses his hand, arm, eye, ear, or some limb of his body has to be amputated. You cannot cure a malignancy with an alcohol rub. Therefore there are those in our society who are sick, and society must be protected.

Capital punishment is a deterrent to crime. Thousands of criminals were interviewed, and they were asked this question: "Why didn't you kill your victim when you raped or robbed that individual?" Eighty percent of them said the reason they did not kill the victim was that they were afraid of the electric chair. They had no scruples against killing the individual, but they were afraid they might be put to death.

And isn't it difficult and strange that these soft-headed judges cannot understand that? I have often thought about that judge, or governor, or whoever he was who turned that ex-convict loose, who raped those little girl scouts out in Oklahoma. I wonder if it disturbed him the least bit in the world when he read about it?

King Henry VIII once pardoned a man who had been guilty of killing another person. After he pardoned this man who was guilty of murder, the man went out and killed again. When King Henry VIII was asked to pardon this individual again, the King said, "I refuse to do it. He killed the first man, but I killed the second man by pardoning the murderer of the first man."

And when these judges turn these criminals loose on society to rape and murder, they themselves are guilty of violating the command, "Thou shalt not kill."

The attorney general in the state of Florida said that from 1935 to 1965 there were nine thousand homicides committed. That was during the time when capital punishment was being enforced. In 1965 they did away with capital punishment, and from 1965 to 1975 homicides jumped to twenty-two thousand five hundred per year.

Well, someone may say, "If this sixth commandment is not talking about capital punishment, and if it is not talking about the killing of animals, what is it discussing?"

The sixth commandment is an injunction against three kinds of murder.

1. INTENTIONAL MURDER. Intentional murder is homicide. That is, an individual is forbidden to take another's life. And it is wrong whether it is carried out by ruthless communism or raping a young girl, sacrificing her body upon the altar of pleasure, and then strangling her to death, or taking a pistol and shooting someone down. It is homicide; it is wrong; God condemns it; and the sixth commandment condemns it.

2. INFANTICIDE. The sixth commandment is also an injunction against infanticide. It is just as wrong to kill an unborn baby as it is to kill a baby after it is born. Over a million little babies will be slaughtered and willfully put to death by the approval of the nine men who make up the Supreme Court, and also of the approval of the U.S. Government. And in reading the Bible we get disturbed over reading about Herod indiscriminately killing those babies two years old and under, in and around Jerusalem.

Then we were terribly upset when, during World War II, we read about Hitler who indiscriminately killed children as he killed the adults.

And would you have thought a few years ago that the U.S. Government would stamp their approval upon slaughtering of over a million babies every year? The Supreme Court ruled in 1973 that every woman in the U.S. has the same right to abortion during the first three months of pregnancy that she would have to any other form of minor surgery. I resent referring to the killing of a little baby in the womb as minor surgery. It is a terrible commentary upon America when the government will spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to protect some rare species of wild animals in the forest, but will not protect the baby in the womb. It is a sad commentary upon America when the government will spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to protect some rare species of fish in the water, but will not protect the baby in the womb. We need to stand up and speak out against such sins.

In Psalm 2:1-4, "Why do the heathen rage; and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision."

In Psalm 37:13, "The Lord shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming.

In Psalm 59:8, "But thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them: thou shalt have all the heathen in derision."

In Proverbs 1:22-31, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

But someone says, "Brother Black, it all depends upon when life begins."

That is exactly right. In Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou cameth forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

We are told the heart begins to beat in twenty-five days.

There are brain waves recorded in forty-five days. A child perspires, moves its hands, feet, and tongue in nine to ten weeks. There are fingernails in three months. To kill a child in the womb is intentional murder and is wrong. It is a violation of the command, "Thou shalt not kill."

3. SUICIDE. This sixth commandment is not only a law against homicide and infanticide, it is also a law against suicide. It is just as wrong for me to destroy my body as it is to destroy your body because the body belongs to God. It is the temple wherein the spirit dwells. Oh, I am aware of the fact that there may be instances where an individual is mentally sick, emotionally disturbed, and is not responsible. I am not talking about these people, but I am also aware of the fact that many times an individual may become so deeply involved in sin that he doesn't know what to do other than to take his life. In fact, the cases that I read about in the Bible where the people committed suicide were because they were so deeply involved in sin.

In First Samuel the thirty-first chapter, we read of Saul committing suicide. But when we read the life of Saul, we learn that he became so involved in sin that he killed himself.

In Second Samuel the seventeenth chapter, we read of Ahithophel who also committed suicide. But it was because his counsel was not taken. He, too, was involved in sin. He was involved in a conspiracy.

In First Kings the sixteenth chapter, we read of Zimri who ran into the house, set the house on fire and burned himself to death. But he, too, was so deeply involved in sin that this act was the way he tried to get out of it.

In Matthew the twenty-seventh chapter, we read of Judas Iscariot committing suicide, but, he, too, was deeply involved in sin.

So, it is wrong for an individual to commit suicide. It is a violation of the law, "Thou shalt not kill."

And then this verse condemns INDIRECT MURDER. There is indirect murder of cruelty. Many parents, no doubt, have gone to an early grave because of the way their children conducted themselves. No doubt, many fathers have gone to early graves because of wayward sons. Many mothers have gone to early graves because of the way their daughters lived and conducted themselves. Many elders have, no doubt, gone to early graves because of the cruelty they received from members of the church. When we kill people by cruelty, we are guilty of indirect murder, and it is a violation of the law, "Thou shalt not kill."

Two boys came home drunk one night. The father met them at the door. He gave each of them a pistol and said, "I want you to go up and kill your mother." The boys said, "What is wrong with you, Dad? Have you lost your mind?" He said "No, I have not lost my mind, but you are conducting yourselves in such a way that you are killing your mother by degrees. It would be much better for you to kill her instantly than by degrees."

The Chinese had a cruel way of torturing people to death. They would put an individual under a huge reservoir of water. They would strap this individual so that he could not move his head, and that water would drop, drop, drop, drop, until finally the nervous system would explode. This individual would die, and he died of cruelty.

And there is not only indirect murder by cruelty, there is indirect murder by corruption. In Habakkuk 2:12, it says, "Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stabisheth a city by iniquity!" When we have to build our cities on whiskey, topless bars, and prostitution, we are on the verge of being destroyed.

Then there is indirect murder of carnality. In First John 2:15-17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

Many people, who claim to speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent, live very intemperate lives. The Bible teaches moderation and temperance. In First Corinthians 6:19-20, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

Some time ago, I went to a place to preach in a gospel meeting. They were telling me about the preacher who had been there for two or three years before this time. They were telling me how the members disliked this preacher. The attendance dropped, and the members would not come to hear this preacher, they didn't respect him. I asked, "What did he do?" I was told that at the worship hour on Sunday morning, this preacher stood in the pulpit and condemned smoking, and said if an individual let a little weed two or three inches long become his master, he wasn't worthy to wear the name Christian. He said the very idea of a man becoming a slave to a cigarette. He was really hard on those who smoked. I said to this individual, "I condemn smoking." The man said, "Yes, I know you do, but that preacher, who condemned smoking, weighed about three hundred and fifty or four hundred pounds. While he was condemning smoking, the members were sitting there looking at him and thinking, 'You glutton! How can you stand in the pulpit and condemn us for smoking cigarettes!' " Let me tell you something, my friends. It is just as sinful in the sight of God to kill yourself eating as it is to kill yourself smoking.

I know many times preachers do not teach it like this and do not think about it like this. For instance, a preacher will go into some good sister's home, and she will prepare for him all of these rich foods. He will take two or three helpings of everything, and then he will not be satisfied. He will eat one dessert, and if she has cake, he will eat it also. If she has pie, he will eat that. Then after he has eaten and eaten, he will rear back, fold his arms, laugh, and say, "I'm suffering with pleasure!" Why, that man is just as guilty before God of violating the law of sin of carnality as any other person who violates the law of God! We should refrain from doing anything which destroys the body. Overeating is a sin of carnality, and it is a violation of the law, "Thou shalt not kill." And I repeat, it is just as sinful for a man to eat himself to death as it is to smoke himself to death.

And then there is INVISIBLE MURDER. Now this is the murder that cannot be seen with the eye. This is the murder where no blood is shed. This is the murder that will never be brought to court. This is the murder in all probability for which one will never be disciplined. This is the murder one commits, and continues to lead in prayer, continues to wait on the Lord's Table, and continues to preach in the pulpit. This is murder that is acted out in the heart. When an individual commits murder in the heart, the Lord writes down with His pen of iron in flames of fire on tables of lead "murder." In Matthew 15:19, Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." These things come from the heart. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus Christ said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: but whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

Albert Barnes, in commenting on this, says, "These verses denote a degree of suffering higher than the punishment inflicted by the court of seventy of the Sanhedren."

Notice it. 1. He that hates his brother without a cause is guilty of the violation of the sixth commandment and shall be punished with a severity similar to that inflicted by the court of judgment.

2. He, that shall suffer his passion to transport him still further so that he shall make his brother an object of derision and contempt, shall be exposed to a more severe punishment corresponding to that which the Sanhedrin council inflicts.

3. But he, who shall load his brother with odious appelations and abusive language, shall incur the severest degree of punishment represented by being burned alive in the horrible, awful valley of Hinnom.

The Jews considered but one crime a violation of the sixth commandment, and that was actual murder. But Jesus says the commandment is much broader. It relates not only to the external act but to feelings and words.

He specifies three forms of such violations: (1) unjust anger, (2) anger accompanied with an expression of contempt, and (3) anger with an expression not only of contempt but wickedness.

Among the Jews there were three degrees of condemnation: The Judgment, the council, and the Fire of Hinnom. Not only could murder be punished by Jehovah, but anger and contempt should be regarded by Him as a violation of the laws and punished according to the offense.

As these offenses were not actually cognizable before the Jewish tribunal, it must mean he will be punished hereafter. And all these expressions, therefore, relate to degrees of punishment apportioned to crime in the future world; the world of justice and woe. When one says, "Raca, you fool," God writes down "murder." When one's heart becomes headquarters for hate, God writes down "murder."

In First John 3:15, John says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."

In First John 2:9-11, "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes."

In First John 4:20, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

I am amazed at the hate that is in the world; racial hate, religious hate, revengeful hate, brotherhood hate, hatemongers. Oh, we, in the church, do not call it hate, we just call it a bad attitude.

Haven't you seen certain men whom you refer to as having a bad attitude? And yet, these men are in full fellowship. Maybe you refer to a certain preacher and in discussing this preacher you say, "Oh, I know his attitude is bad. He has a terrible attitude." But you are putting your arms around him, aren't you? You are encouraging him, aren't you? You are endorsing him, aren't you?

And that man whose heart has become headquarters for hate is just as guilty of murder in the sight of God as the man who takes a pistol and shoots another man down.

Brother, if your heart is filled with hatred, you better get right with God. I think I have seen elders and preachers with hateful, spiteful attitudes, and yet, they are in full fellowship.

Brethren, when are we going to learn the basic fundamental principles of Christianity? There is a great danger in thinking that we are heavenly in character when we are only comparing ourselves to the world of darkness about us.

I read of this lady who went to the doctor for an examination, and the doctor said to her, "Lady, you have hydrophobia." She started writing, and the doctor said, "You need not start writing your will. You are not going to die; we can cure you." She said, "I am not writing my will. Didn't you say I had hydrophobia?" The doctor said, "Yes." She said, "Well, I am writing down the names of the people I am going to bite."

I think I had a confrontation with some of her people once.

So when we begin to bite and devour one another, it is spiritual hydrophobia. And the Bible condemns invisible murder. Maybe you have never shot a man down in your life, but let me ask you, "How many have you murdered in your heart?"

But what is the remedy for this? The remedy is the love of God. The gospel that portrays the love of God can change the heart of hate into a heart of love. All problems must be solved in the context of love. All differences must be settled in the context of love. One may come up with all the intellectual answers of the world; you may have your intellectual answers, and I may have my intellectual answers. One may come up with all the syllogistics; he may present all the major premises; the minor premises; and then the conclusion. But unless our problems are settled in the context of love, they can never be settled.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus Christ said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

The love of God is what we need in the Lord's church. That is the only thing that will ever drive this hate out of the hearts of people.

This man went to the preacher and said, "I guess I have broken all the commandments but one." The preacher said, "Which one is that?" The man said, "Thou shalt not kill." The preacher said, "You broke that one about two thousand years ago when you helped crucify the Son of God." Our hands slapped His innocent face. It was our spittle that defiled His face. Our sins were the nails that held Him to the cross. Our hard hearts were the hammers that drove those nails into His hands and feet. And yet the cross that reveals our guilt also reveals our salvation.

In Isaiah 53:5-6, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

There was a man walking down a railroad track one night with his lantern. He observed that some rails had been broken and moved. He heard a train coming. He knew that there were many passengers on this train, and in all probability many of them would be killed. So the only thing he knew to do was to run up the track to meet the train, waving this lighted lantern. But in his excitement he fell and broke the lantern. He picked up the broken lantern and kept running up the track. Before the train got to him he jumped off the track and hurled the lantern into the face of the engineer. The engineer, realizing danger, stopped the train, and many lives were saved because of the warning of this individual.

We are to hold up the blood-stained banner of the Lord Jesus Christ and tell the world what Jesus Christ has done for us.

And remember the words in Exodus 20-13, "Thou shalt not kill."